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GYPSY AFLOAT

ELLA K. MAILLART

The enchantment of this book of wind and water, of barges and yachts, of sailors and gypsies of the sea, immediately captures the imagination. Ella Maillart, intrepid traveller in the farthest and least known parts of the earth from Peking to Kashmir, from T'ien Shan to Kizil Kum, here turns to earlier and more leisurely journeys, to sailing in the English Channel, round the French coast and in the Mediterranean.

Her first journey in this book was as deck hand on a sailing barge in the Channel. Then followed a Mediterranean cruise in a yawl; tunny fishing on the lovely *Atalante,* cruising cutter built for deep seas and intended for a daring trip across the Atlantic which never came off; an exciting escape on a motor yacht fleeing from a French harbour; a cruise enlivened with many accidents through the famous bulb gardens of Holland in spring time; a fashionable summer at St. Jean de Luz; racing week at Cowes; life on a yacht in a quiet English backwater; and finally goodbye to *Atalante.*

Even those who have never been on a yacht will feel the magic of this hard, free life when, as Mlle. Maillart tells us, she "belongs to the world of the shrill gulls, a world where wind and water seem to rule everywhere." But even more real than her sailing experiences are the vivid sketches of the unusual personalities she sailed with: the charming Miette, the lovable, irascible Colonel, the Admiral and his beautiful daughter, the sailors from many countries, poets, drunkards, famous yachtsmen, and a host of unknown but colourful characters.

GYPSY AFLOAT

By the same Author

Forbidden Journey (Peking to Kashmir)—
From the French: *Oasis Interdites* (Grasset).

Turkestan Solo (T'ien Shan to Kizil Kum)—
From the French: *Des Monts Célestes aux Sables Rouges* (Grasset).

Parmi la Jeunesse Russe (Moscou et Caucase) (Fasquelle).

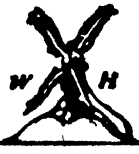
ELLA K. MAILLART

GYPSY AFLOAT

BY

ELLA K. MAILLART

"That surplus energy of youth must be used up.
It is the drive and essence of life: it is life itself.
It must in each generation be 'getting on'."
—H. G. WELLS.



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To
MIETTE

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PREFACE

THE following pages are nothing more than a few memories of my fickle youth which took place during a fickle moment of the world's life. I have assembled them in an endeavour to sum up my past, outrun it and forget it, once it has helped me to find out what I am.

In order to understand my story the reader ought to know that I began to sail on planks and logs at a tender age. Later on and during many years, I devoted every spare hour of the summer months to sailing. I handled dinghies and open-boats before I was trusted with a 'one-ton' boat, the *Poodle*, and a 'six metres fifty', the *Gypsy*. This training took place on the Lake of Geneva where I cruised mainly with Miette.

To me nothing mattered except the desire to become a perfect sailor. Therefore, though grown-up in size, I never devoted my thoughts to planning a 'serious life'.

My country sent me to Paris during the Olympic Games to sail in the single-handed competition disputed between seventeen nations. Miette chose me to sail with her during six months in the Mediterranean aboard her three-ton sloop *Perlette*. Some of the talks we had then with Alain Gerbault were to be of great importance to our plans. We also sailed a ten-tonner to Athens, starting with a crew of four girls. It is a story I shall not write here as it has already been dealt with by Marthe Oulié in a book, as well as in the Paris *Illustration* and in *Je sais tout*—by Stephen King-Hall in *Blackwood's Magazine*—by Lieut. L. Luard, I cannot remember where, and by myself as a log published in the *Yachting Monthly*.

Therefore when I came to England for the first time, the only thing I could boast of was a practical knowledge of sailing.

Now a few words are needed about another subject. My knowledge of grammar is non-existent. And the Quetta community is responsible for the good English of this book; the bad is mine. In particular I want to thank Bee Smeeton and Dishie Gastrell. I am deeply grateful for the good-will and patience they showed me. They hated my semi-colons; but I wanted some of them to remain. . . . Then my good star sent Heather Christison across my path. She is the only friend who went through my sentences from beginning to end, applying her clear thinking to my muddled output. To her I feel indebted more than I can say.

I wrote these pages in English instead of French, because I do not like the small surprises I get when reading the work of even the best of my translators. But many a time I thought that I was much too bold. . . .

My memory is not good. So I wrote to my friend the Colonel, asking him what he remembered about the *Volunteer*. I received the following lines:

"In 1924, having more money than brains, I bought a very old barge lying at Cowes. Her canvas having been well soaked with the filthy preparation bargees use, was quite in order, but the hull was suffering from my own complaint, wear and tear and general depreciation.

"I bought a barge as they are the most charming class of boat to own. Not only are they good sea-boats, but they'll sail closer to the wind than any racing cutter. You can sit down and keep upright on any sand bank or mud flat, and where you see a swan feeding you are quite certain you can go, a goose doubtful, and a duck certainly not.

"A barge is quite different to handle or sail from any other ship. You start with your topsail, and with this huge sail and the lee-boards, you can go round corners, climb up hill (in canals) and do many extraordinary things that the ordinary ship-owner has no idea of. I wanted to try and ease expenses, so on alternate weeks I advertised in *The Times* for paying guests, who came like flies in August, and secondly navigation lessons, which did not seem to catch on so well.

"One day I got a letter from Hertfordshire on French notepaper smelling of patchouli, written with a French pen which always makes a hole in the writing paper if you want to make an upstroke. This letter was written on the usual four page sheet, and as far as I can remember was much as follows:—

Dear Sir, I regret to say that I am not well enough off to become a paying guest or to pay for navigational lessons. But I should much like to come and work my passage. I hold an Italian certificate and last year in the Baltic I won three out of six firsts for the Swiss Government. I am Swiss. My age is twenty. I am strong and active and useful on a boat.

Faithfully yours,

E. MAILLART.

"This signature was almost at the bottom of the third page. Underneath it was a 'P.T.O.'; when I turned it round I saw the following extraordinary wording, 'I forgot to say I was a girl.'

"I was feeling that morning rather like a cock pheasant on a wet day, tail on the ground and wings drooping, but when I saw this I began to crow loud and strong.

"I promptly sat down and took a quill pen, which incidentally is the only pen an educated man ever uses, and wrote off to Mademoiselle Maillart at the address given and asked her to come and lunch with me at the Carlton Grill on the following Wednesday. I asked her to wear a white flower and added 'you will easily recognise me as the fattest man you ever saw.'

"Out of anxiety I suppose I was a bit early, but after having waited about quarter of an hour in the foyer, in walks a tall beautifully figured very distinguished young woman. I had previously made a hole in *The Times* newspaper behind which I hid myself, and studied the apparition through the hole. I was well pleased, so jumped up and made her acquaintance. First thing she said which hit my fancy was—

'I'm devilish hungry, for God's sake give me some grub quick.' So we turned to and had a good lunch. I cross-examined her severely, what she was? and what was she doing? To which cross-examination I got the following answer: 'I am French and German instructress in a girls' school. . . .' My next question was 'How's the pay?'—'Slightly above the average.'—'What's the head mistress like?' Her answer was: 'The dearest old lady in the world.' I then said: 'What do you want to leave for?'—'Oh!' said Ella, 'I am going as mate in a barque in the middle of July, and I don't want to put the Head in a hole by leaving her before the end of a term.'—'Good girl!' thinks I.

"There happened to be going on at Islington a show called 'The small boat Exhibition'. We drove up there and I listened to her talk to all these boat makers. In five minutes I realised that she knew all about it.

"The barge was fitting out under an old Royal Naval mate, at a place absolutely at the end of the world, called Brightlingsea. I offered Ella the job as cabin-boy, 30s. a week and her grub, which she jumped at. I fitted her out with a short blue skirt, blue stockings, white shoes, a jersey with the barge's name on it, in red letters. . . . Part of her job was also to cook for the two hands I had on board fitting the barge out.

"One day I went down to see my mate when he said: 'Begging your pardon Sir, this 'ere girl baint much of a cook, but she's just about the best deck hand I've ever come across.' Next week-end we started, and I hadn't been afloat for ten minutes when I found my mate's remarks were perfectly true, so I dropped our hook just outside the Brightlingsea creek, went back in the dinghy, secured a professional yachting cook, and promoted Ella deck hand. Needless to say before we had all been aboard six hours, she was master of the ship and crew; myself and the passengers were all her devoted servants."

PART I

CHAPTER I

BARGEES

"Delights of work most real—delights that change
The headache life of towns to rapture strange
Not known by townsmen, nor imagined; health
That puts new glory upon mental wealth
And makes the poor man rich."

—MASEFIELD

THE clouds are low, grey, heavy with rain. Under her tanned sails the barge is forcing her way ahead. The pale green sea turns into a lather of snow-white foam around the humped backs of the sandbanks.

Steering the *Volunteer* is difficult. She kicks: she suddenly decides to make her wheel turn twice, at such a speed that it would break your arm to try and stop it. The only way is to guess when she will do it and nip that movement in the bud. I think it happens when we gather too much speed down the slope of a wave. Now, beating to windward on the port tack, even without the help of the engine, I can 'make' the Warp Channel.

This is sailing! I belong to the world of the shrill gulls, a world where wind and water seem to rule everywhere, a world where I see almost nothing but skies about me. We plunge ahead in a great noise of smashed waves. With her flat bottom the *Volunteer* does not heel over like the boats I am used to; but just the same I know that she is going all out. The topsail is on her, and it worries me. Though it has been explained to me that barges carry their topsails when every other sail is brailed up, and that the topsail is the first canvas they set . . . just at this moment I don't like such a surface of canvas so high up.

I can hear the barge as well as see her going, now that

the engine is stopped. I get to know her slowly; I study how much helm she needs. She is quite steady on her present course. What a joy to feel for the first time a hull of 120 tons alive under your fingers, when you have only steered small craft so far.

We pass a loaded barge going the other way, and her skipper in oilskins gives me a wide salute with his arm. I answer quietly as if I had met barges all my life, but I really want to shout and dance like a Red Indian out of sheer excitement. . . . The skipper cannot know how pleased and proud I am to belong once more to the people of the sea, and how difficult it has been to make my desire come true. Or, if I want to dance, is it perhaps because the weather is so cold? I am cold, there is no doubt about it. But I would hate to leave the helm now; because Dooley would take her and make a mess of her. . . . I think I am afraid. Yes I am. I don't need to be ashamed of my anxiety. . . . We have got too much canvas on, so much I know. The strain is too great, in every part of hull or rigging. And the whistling easterly breeze increases.

Dooley has finished pumping. I show him the crosstree bent by the tautening shroud. "She carries too much weather-helm!" I shout at him. He answers: "She is all right, she can bear a lot, she is no yacht. . . ." Still, I think something will have to give way.

Our owner has reappeared. He says we must look for shelter in the Thames estuary, though he enjoys our foaming along. As soon as we have passed the East Shoebury-ness, we can ease her off and I feel less nervous.

This kind of grey, wet world is new to me. The sky is probably just as big as over the Mediterranean, but the diffused light is different, the clouds are heavier, the smell of iodine more full of moisture. . . . And I am not used to this feeling of shallowness, this necessity to look at the map so often. It is exciting to sail a sea pickled with so many buoys, lightships and wrecks!

Stern, yellow sandbanks have a secret grandeur of their

own like the desolation of the desert. For the first time I can put the right sort of background to the story of the *Dulcibella*, a deeply loved book which introduced me to the life of the small boat at sea.

In the middle of the coast line I recognise with amusement the houses and the pier of Southend. I have been there before. Two months ago while I was teaching in a girls' school, I longed to see a boat. I decided to spend a week-end at the seaside. Southend was near, therefore cheap. I found a modest, as well as depressing boarding-house, the inmates of which had long ago said all they could to each other. My time was spent as near as possible to the water, in a sheltered corner of the deserted pier where the water rose and fell around the black wooden piles covered with barnacles. . . . Once a pinnace from the battleship *Tiger* brought many men ashore, all noisy and joking. I had envied them because they lived at sea.

To-day I envy nobody. I am at the helm of a sailing boat. And my stiff face sprinkled and burnt by the salt of the spray looks with a smile towards the pier where a French Teacher had felt sorry for herself, once upon a time. . . .

CHAPTER II

At School with Girls

The routine work at 'The Grange', private school for girls near London, was dull. My form was seldom following me because no two girls were at the same level in their knowledge of French; I could only deal with one at a time. My English was poor. I could never finish an explanation of French grammar rules, as I did not know them myself. Dictations were less embarrassing, but they meant many exercise-books to correct and sometimes I took them back to my room at night with the bottle of red ink. My room was upstairs in a small farm-house across the garden smelling of moisture. The place was damp, in spite of the coal fire I could have lighted in a grate dug half-way up the wall. From downstairs, where everybody was already asleep, came a whiff of warm humanity. This old room with its rickety washstand painted green, never welcomed me back.

The only other place where I could sit was the tiny staff-room where we gathered near the round stove. There ruled Wilson, the senior mistress, a bit of a dragon with her pince-nez dangling; she used to breeze in and out with an armful of books, complaining about one or the other of those silly girls.

Meals I particularly dreaded. I sat at the head of a table where I wanted to deal justly with twelve giggling girls who observed every one of my movements. But whatever trick I tried, whether with porridge, suet pudding or watery Irish-stew, there was never a real helping for the last girl and myself.

I also dreaded the draughts chasing after me everywhere: in the dining-hall, in the passages as well as in the class-rooms. The system of 'plenty of fresh air' meant that one

was constantly looking round to find out who dared blow a damp breath down one's neck, especially when we had put on our evening dresses at night. I could not get rid of a cold in my head, and it seemed as if I would be forever mopping my nose.

Only once a week after dinner was the staff allowed into the drawing-room for half an hour. There Mrs. Chignell, the head of the school, smart in her black lace dress, would converse about English books or plays I did not know. Our first meeting had taken place in one of Messrs. Truman and Knightley's small parlours. I had relied on this serious agency to find a paid job for me. And when I saw Mrs. Chignell with her lively eyes, wrinkled face and fuzzy hair, I wanted to work for her because she looked clever and not at all the dried-up schoolmistress type I dislike. In my one and only certificate she had been mainly struck by the fact that I had been a good disciplinarian in the boys' school where I had taught.

"Well," she had said, "so far my French Mademoiselles have always been appalling. I might just as well try you, though you will hardly be older than the oldest girl. Perhaps when they learn that you are good at games, they will obey you. . . ."

When I considered the successful end of our interview, I felt grateful towards my short seal-skin coat and my broad-brimmed felt-hat, like a cow-boy's Stetson, for creating a smart, as well as sporting, appearance.

But at the Grange Mrs. Chignell had become very distant, eating first-class food at the head-table and hidden away the rest of the time in her rooms.

Yes, routine work was dull. The school books were so uninteresting! One had to invent little tricks to make the girls collaborate. They had seen, heard, read nothing of what I knew. They had never lived among their elders as we did on the Continent. They had no hints of what matters, of what creates beauty in a picture, a verse, a song. They had experienced nothing at first hand. They were full of

silly excuses about their work; they didn't know what they wanted, they had no curiosity; but I found out that they were impressed by one of them, a fat and stuttering child whose father, they told me, was a 'Sir' . . . The only thing they did well was to giggle, and it was difficult to stop them. Curiously enough I never felt their senior; I studied their primitive cheating tricks with indulgence, and I laughed heartily with them at the classical mistakes I made in my silly English. Then I would stop the noise by saying:

"Enough of that, girls; now we work, it is school-time and you must help me to run this show properly."

Getting away with my bluff had been amusing at first when I was not cursing something like my cold or the food. (So far I had only had three months experience of teaching during which I had had a row with the principal nearly every day. I had been glad to end that experience as quickly as possible.) But I had to put up with a lot: during my first interview with Mrs. Chignell I had agreed to give some private German lessons, thinking that my school knowledge of that language would be sufficient for English girls (French being my mother tongue). To my horror I found that my pupil Esther was Danish and knew nearly as much as I did. Calm, self-possessed Esther with your long fair plaits, your blue eyes still make me uneasy when I remember you: do you know that I spent most nights before our lessons learning by heart the difficult words or rules we would find in our texts? I ought to thank you for not having given me away.

After that, I discovered that the French Mademoiselles always took needlework; I heard with awe that one of my classes must learn how to make a decent pair of drawers.

Happily I was still wearing what I might call my advanced childhood's outfit. So at night, not knowing what else to do and seen by no one, I carefully undid the seams of my underwear, so that I might study the cut and shape of front and back.

It was pleasing to see these unexpected difficulties well mastered, but this joy wore off. I had nothing to look for-

ward to, except joining the local team for their weekly hockey match, but there nobody cared to converse with an inarticulate foreigner. Anyhow none of the girls from the hockey club seemed to have anything to say, as they generally went away as quickly as possible, once they had dutifully taken their weekly exercise. I devoted myself more and more to the cruising books I had brought with me. In order to create a homely atmosphere in my chilly room I sometimes smoked the old pipe I had sucked at during many a happy winter evening in mountain huts.

One of these lonely moods was interrupted by a visit from Puck. She was thrilled with what I was smoking, with what I was reading and with what I began to tell her. Puck, the only bright spot in my life, was made of a mass of brown waving hair, a silly little nose, dimples all over her funny face, a straight look, and short, well-developed legs. As she was games-mistress, she knew how to look after my sprained ankle. I thought she had given me up as no good after I had made a fool of myself at one of her "gym" lessons; but she told me much later how marvellous it was to see the "French mistress" land flat on top of the vaulting horse. . . . Now and then she used to dash off in her sports car; she was the sister of a well-known actor called Henson, and I had thought that our paths would never meet.

So far I had called on the two or three elderly and respectable people my parents knew in London; but all their children were married, and they did not care for me. I thought they had provided all I was to see of English life. Every fortnight I had a free week-end. I would go to London to explore museums or queer back-streets used by pale people, where unending rows of black houses were depressing in their similarity. When hungry I ate sandwiches in those overstacked places which were neither shops nor pubs nor restaurants. There it was nearly impossible to understand what my neighbours were saying. I had to save every penny for the doctor's bill. Yes, my cold had got worse and I had gone to a specialist whose address the matron

had given me. Six times I went there to have my nose-bone punched through by a trocar-needle in order to have my sinus washed. How I hated it and how I used to groan! . . . This great doctor, horrified by my behaviour, used to say very patiently: "I can do nothing to you until you promise to remain silent; I cannot have my neighbours say that I maltreat my patients . . ." One day somebody said that a doctor established in Harley Street would charge two guineas at least (whatever a guinea was) per appointment. As I was earning £20, not guineas, per term, my account was on the depressing side. Unhappily the doctor must have thought I was rich because he had said casually: "You must go south as quickly as possible, this climate is not good for you, and you won't recover here." Of course I had already prepared a moving speech for the last appointment hoping to pay the minimum! As far as I was concerned two facts were certain; I had to be a hundred per cent healthy in view of the difficult life I was preparing for; secondly, I had sworn to myself never to write home for money. If I could not keep true to my word, it would be the end of the world I was living for.

It was a surprise to hear Pucky inviting me to her home for the next week-end, and asking also if I could lend her my second pipe! There was Pucky squatting on my floor. She liked to be told about my sailing experiences, and she liked the warmth of a round pipe in the hollow of her hand, though it made her sick I am sure. (I was smoking then a 'paquet gris' given to me once upon a time by a French 'inscrit maritime' at Porquerolles.) I had come to call her Puck because she could run so fast, and to her I was Gobbo since we had been reciting Shakespeare:

'I go. I go! Look how I go!
Swift as the arrow from the Tartar's bow.'

From that day on, life was less grim; we decided to react against the prison atmosphere of the school and we shocked

other mistresses by smoking our pipes in the staff-room. Of course a tragedy was inevitable. One day, for the first and last time, Mrs. Chignell entered our den, to see Pucky puffing with gusto. She said nothing and looked rather amused, we thought. Later she must have changed her mind for rumours came back to us that she had said our filthy habits must stop. Pucky was furious and planned a direct attack on the 'Big Lady' in order to ask her why she hadn't spoken her mind openly at the time. I showed Pucky a trick to hide one's nervousness on such occasions, which was to catch a firm hold of one's handkerchief corner. . . . The attack worked well; upset by the bravery of the little games-mistress, Mrs. Chig denied having ever wanted to interfere with our pastime.

Pucky became interested in sailing and I read to her passages from Jack London's *Cruise of the Snark*. I could explain to her the intense meaning expressed in the words: "I have done it with my own hands." To work at things yourself is the only thing that matters, I added, with such conviction that she remembered it twelve years later when she sat at the tiller of her own sailing boat for the first time.

How far we were then from the high sea! Our time was taken up with teaching our backward children, or battling with the butler for more bread during meals. "There is no more", he would say, "and Mrs. Chignell has the keys." Meanwhile Mrs. Chig would be deftly going through a six-course dinner.

I did not want to become part of my surroundings, and I was so afraid that the rest of the staff would think of me as one of themselves that I was ready to put up with jokes against the "French Madmizell", forgetting she was really myself. I felt that before I could take up teaching seriously no less than a new system of education would have to be adopted . . . But for the time being I had to stick to this school work, according to my programme, until next summer when something GRAND was going to happen.

One day I got seriously upset. Pucky looked at me with

a smile. "You are funny", she said, "you have eyes like a race horse . . ."

"Well I feel a bit too wild here sometimes", I answered, "but I can't let Mrs. Chig down. Two terms will soon be done with, and at the beginning of July I shall be sailing for Greece with my three girl friends. . . ."

"What do you mean," said Puck, "the holidays don't begin till August. . . ."

It was true. The summer vacation on the continent began one month earlier than in England. And I the mate, had promised Miette, my captain, that I would join her on the first of July. . . . She was now at Marseilles secretly buying a cheap old cruising boat. For the last two years we had been making preparations for exploring some of the Greek islands. What was I to do? Well, Mrs. Chig had to go by the board, so much was clear, and I must leave the Grange before the beginning of the summer term. The children would have to put up with a third 'Madmizell' in one year. And I must find a job for April, May and June, for I was penniless. I only knew one way of doing that, which was to get interested in the newspapers once more and to read the advertisements carefully.

I answered a few demands for companions or governesses without enthusiasm. But one day my heart did beat faster. There appeared in *The Times* personal column, in the well cut print known the world over, the following: "Owner of a 120-ton yacht willing to take pupils in navigation. Sailing as soon as possible". There was fate winking at me. I had come to England not only to study English because it was the best maritime language, but also to learn about sea currents and navigation. Neither the lake of Geneva nor the Mediterranean had provided such experiences.

In my room the following epistle was composed with trembling hand:—

Dear Sir,

I should like to have more particulars about your yacht and your

plans. Could we perhaps have an interview in London and where?

I will sail in the 'Adriatic' next summer but I could join your party until the end of June.

With another friend I sailed during six winter months in the Mediterranean along the Riviera and to Corsica in a 3-ton boat without engine or crew. I am used to all sorts of work on board, splicing, scraping, varnishing, cooking, from cabin boy to captain. I sailed in the last Olympic Games for my country. Being twenty and strong I know I could be useful in many ways. Also if you have some inexperienced sailors about, you cannot be day and night on deck with them, so I could take your place when you would want somebody you could trust.

Because I am very short of money now, I could only pay for my food, and that if you thought my work was worth nothing. So I am afraid I would not do in case you only want people for their money.

I can give you the highest references in London. In case we cannot meet will you give me your references, as well as particulars concerning the boat. I should be so glad to sail for the first time in the waters described by Claude Worth.

Sincerely yours,

P.S.—Reading this letter I just discover that nothing can tell you that I am a girl, but I do not think it matters as everybody is so alike in sailors' kit, and I am a sailor first and only.

After I had run to the letter-box through the dumb fog, my life became a long waiting. Would I ever get an answer? Could this landlubber life of mine be near its end? Would I sleep again alongside the planking of a hull? Would I soon be alone, wrapped round in the inspiring silence of the sea? Would I live again with the clean people of the sea, deal with clean things like ropes, scrubbed decks, and salted stinging spray? Would I become once more part of a living boat, feel myself powerful because of her spread canvas, her shiny mass plunging ahead, her creaking topmast bending under the wind? Then at last I would feel alive in my heart, my soul, and my muscles at the same time. . . . It would not

be a pastime, but a training for the career I had chosen—sailing.

I decided to be wise and expect nothing from the *Times'* man so that I should not be disillusioned.

Answer or no answer, Mrs. Chig had to be warned so that she could look for another French teacher. During that most difficult interview I had of course a handkerchief to twist in my hands. A few sharp remarks were addressed to me such as: "If you can't stick to serious work for more than three months without running away, I can tell you that you will never attain anything in life . . . I never heard of such a mad excuse as a cruise to break a contract . . . How do you expect me to find somebody for the last term? . . . And to think that this must happen when for once I was having no trouble with the French hours! . . ."

For a week life went on, more damp, more grey than ever after this vision of a better life. The post brought nothing but a letter from my mother saying how pleased my father was to know that Ella was making a living and working seriously. I had rushed away from Geneva just to prove to my father that I could live without his support, even though I had learnt nothing but ski-ing and sailing. I had to accept the first job that turned up. But I felt it would not last long. My father and Mrs. Chig belonged to that sphere in which grown-ups seem to move submissively. And I wanted to tell them that I did not care for their depressing world. They did not realise that just making a living seemed unsatisfactory to me; that I wanted to live for something that could keep my enthusiasm burning all the time. They thought that they could settle my problems by saying: "It is youth, the girl will soon grow out of it and learn better."

Fate spoke through the telephone. For the first and last time during my stay at the Grange, I rushed to the box built under the staircase. It was a trunk call and the telephone seemed full of queer noises. Then I heard: "Jack Benett speaking here. I received your letter addressed to *The Times*. Meet me Saturday next at 3 p.m. Automobile

Club, Pall Mall."—"Yes, all right," I said nervously, "how shall I recognise you?"—"Meet me Saturday next when I come to town . . ." answered the unknown voice.—"Yes, I got that. Shall I ask for you at the desk?"—"Meet me Saturday Automobile Club," repeated the deep voice once more, before ending the conversation abruptly.

Well, so much was clear, but I was annoyed. Had I created a bad impression already, and had my English been incomprehensible? Otherwise how could I explain the queer way in which Jack Benett had behaved?

Three days later, cowboy hat down over the right ear, sealskin coat tightened by a leather belt, yellow golf-shoes on my feet! (I had thought that high heels would look frivolous) I entered the Automobile Club.

I was prepared to be strong, silent and suspicious.

But there, in this too grandiose building, in the ladies' pink drawing-room, was somebody so unexpected and picturesque that all my carefully thought-out misgivings vanished at once. Walking towards me with dragging heels, legs wide apart the better to support the largest stomach I had ever seen, was Colonel John Fane Benett-Stanford, with a long cigar in the middle of his face. A face so red that it was clear many good meals and good drinks had been spent on it, as my mother would have said. He wore a navy blue suit which once upon a time must have been double-breasted, but which was fastened now by a bit of shoe lace through the two button-holes where his waist was at its widest; the row of four small buttons which are usually on the outside of the sleeve, were sewn on top. I looked again at the full face, drooping yellow moustache, bald head, and bulging eyes full of kindness and mischief. He usually had to clear his throat before speaking. He did not really shake hands with you: he moved his plump and stiff fingers in your direction waiting for you to press them.

"But my dear girl", he began, "you are much younger than I thought, I won't be able to put you in the fo'c'sle with the crew. . . . Speak into this ear please, I am deaf in

the other . . . a shell during the war. . . . So you say you know all about sailing, what? Capital, capital. . . ."

He looked rather amused, but did not seem to be impressed by me, and the most convincing proof I could think of was to show him my hard, work-scarred hands. Then he unfolded the blue prints of the *Volunteer*, a large Thames barge converted into a yacht, flat-bottomed, with lee-boards, engine, a bath-room and many fittings with queer names. He had bought her for £600.

Would I care to accompany him to the Nautical Exhibition? Yes, I would care to. We stepped into a taxi, "the only decent sort of car for a gentleman, where one does not have to crawl on all fours to get in. . . ."

So I wasn't very rich and couldn't afford to pay seven guineas a week. . . . Well, well. . . . Was I ready to act as a kind of hostess and look after his paying guests? Yes, I was ready to do that. Well, then, he was quite willing to take me for only £3 a week, everything included. At these words my heart sank; we would never come to terms. 'Adieu veau, vache, cochon, couvée!'

Twisting my handkerchief and gathering courage I answered: "Sir, you don't understand at all. I can work like a man on board, help you to fit her out, and for my work I want to be paid £2 a week, which is rather different from what you propose. You see, all I possess amounts to six kids. . . ." "Good God," he interrupted me, "but my dear young lady, how old did you say you were?"—"What have I said Sir? Would you prefer me to speak French? I mean I have only six pounds to see me through. . . ."

We had arrived at Olympia. The colonel played with the idea of buying a fast motor-boat to go ashore with; he asked for engine prices and enquired about right-hand propellers and other things I had never heard of. He pointed at the stands with his hazel-wood stick which was so long that, holding it near the forked end, he looked like an eighteenth-century silhouette. He would lend his good ear to shy salesmen, and then take leave of them with the words: "I

am very much obliged to you, very grateful to you. . . ."

But he did not know much about sailing equipment, such as hollow spars, or rolling reefing gear, and when I showed enthusiasm about a windlass he laughed, which only meant that he had never broken his back trying to heave up anchors.

Over a cup of tea—he put saccharine in his—we discussed serious matters. Well, would I like to work as a cabin boy? Could I wait at table, and wash up the plates? —Yes,I could—Did I realise it also meant emptying the basins and the pots of the p.g.'s?—Yes, I did.—"Capital, capital," said the colonel, adding something about "these extraordinary foreigners!"

I was ready to put up with a lot rather than go on making twelve helpings out of nine, three times a day. He concluded by saying: "I shall try you for a month, give you a navy-blue skirt with a blazer and thirty shillings a week for a start. If you don't behave with my paying-guests," he added with a twinkle, "I'll have the right to put you ashore at an hour's notice! "—"That is fair", I answered, "but if your p.g.'s don't behave with me, I shall be free to land at once with a week's pay in advance."

We decided to meet next Saturday at Liverpool Street Station, and go together to Brightlingsea where the *Volunteer* was laid up. He, who wanted to make money out of his passengers to help towards expenses, had signed on a foreigner at thirty shillings a week, while I, instead of learning about deep sea sailing and the use of a sextant from the perfect yachtsman, had found a barge that could float in three feet of water, owned by a farming colonel!

The fact must have been that each was amused by the other; it swept aside all other considerations.

CHAPTER III

On the 'Hard', with Men

Life was worth living—I was on board again, though the boat was still laid up. Once more I felt I was meant to deal with ships.

My teaching activity seemed to belong to a past becoming every day more unreal and more incredible. The only proof of it was a certificate on which one read that "I had been interested in my work as well as in my pupils, and I had been eager to help them to improve, which they had certainly done both in grammar and conversation."

In London I had dawdled for a few days, detached from everything and everybody. A distressing experience which made me feel at the same time happy and abandoned. I lived on 'cups of tea', like so many others. The only conversation I had was with the snake-keeper at the Zoo while he was feeding his pensionnaires.

At Brightlingsea, though I felt at home in my surroundings, everything was new to me—the grey light matching low grey houses in silent streets, the fog hanging over the main channel of the River Colne, the jungle of masts and rigging immobile in Aldous's shipyard.

About us everything was strange,—by 'us' I mean the *Volunteer*, Captain Dooley and myself. We all sat on the hard, a queer gathering. The barge, like all her kind, was flat-bottomed, and with her two enormous leeboards resting on the mud like tired flippers, she suggested a dormant sea-elephant. Aft, she ended abruptly with a transom to which was hooked the biggest square rudder I had yet seen. She was black, and at first I nearly cried to see how different she was from the white yacht of my dreams. On deck and below, her laid-up gear made the

sort of picture that pleases a sailor's heart. Compared with the twenty-two foot sloop I had sailed in the Mediterranean, she was something of a liner. After more than seventy years of hard life at sea she was said to leak like a sieve, and tubby Mr. Stone, the owner of our yard, said I was mad to sail in her. She had to be steered by a wheel, a contraption I had never used. Realising from her shape that the barge would be hard to handle at sea, I wanted to get on well with her. I decided never to say openly what I had thought of her at first, and to do my best so that she might adopt me, instead of resenting my intrusion. We would come to terms, I thought.

With Dooley the problem was different. Would he ever accept a female in his crew, and would I be able to keep my peculiar status with his men as well as with the guests? The Colonel had said it was up to me to settle the difficulty. He would be coming back in a week's time to see how the fitting-out progressed.

On the first evening, I told Dooley that I was hard up and had to make a living, and that as I was mad on sailing; it was nice for me to be working on the *Volunteer*. I also told him about my last cruise in the Mediterranean with only another girl. Then I asked him what he thought of the following idea: to the crew as well as to curious outsiders, we would say I was crazy about yachts and wanted to know all about them. To accomplish this the best way was to work in them instead of sitting on their decks as a passenger . . .

Having said all I had carefully prepared, I sat back on my bench in the galley and looked at Dooley. He was oldish with young blue eyes that could shine, a wild brown beard in which lurked a smile that sent the two corners of his mouth skywards. Of course he wore a blue serge suit. He was an old sub-lieutenant of the Royal Navy, promoted from the lower deck. He was Irish.

His eyes looked at me for a long time, and when I began to feel uneasy, he murmured:

"You mustn't worry. God has sent you here. At last he

has answered my prayer. I have lived alone during three months in this old hull without speaking to anybody, and it was more than I could stand. Now that you are here everything will be all right. You remind me very much of my youngest daughter and I will help you," he added.

I could have wished for nothing better, and felt happy. On deck it was dark; heavy squalls were hurling showers of rain on the linen-covered roof, and Dooley screwed down the lee side of the sky-light. In front of the blazing coal of the cooking-stove I began to toast a piece of bread stuck on a fork. During the wintry days the galley was the warmest part of the barge; sink, cupboards and pantry-table were on the port-side; next to the door leading to the fore-peak stood the stove. Starboard, a bench was built against two bunks, and screwed to the bulkhead between us and the bathroom, a sideboard presided over the scene. In spite of the barge's abnormal position high and dry on the hard I felt at home back in a ship.

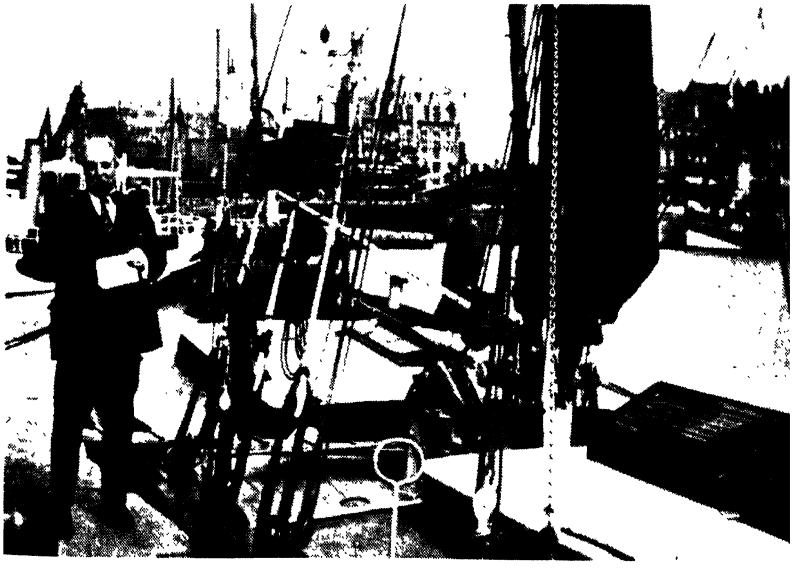
Dooley insisted on giving me his single-berthed cabin, and the first morning on board I was woken up by a knock. Before I could remember where I was, the sliding door was pushed back and the captain placed a cup of tea on the cabin-boy's shelf. Though a bit embarrassed, I had to laugh! It did not look as if I would have to rough it much on board the queer *Volunteer!*

The ship-yard carpenter was already planing and hammering in the double-bed cabin aft of the bath-room, so I got up quickly and put on my jersey and dungarees.

We made a list of all the things to be done, below, on deck, or in the rigging. I was busy four hours in the morning and three in the afternoon. I went to the "Anchor Hotel" for lunch, just twenty yards beyond the hard; but it was depressing there, especially when I compared it with a quiet village inn in Switzerland. I decided to be less stylish and eat from then on with Dooley, who lived on soup and Irish stew.

Life in a ship-yard is pleasant. Your work is useful and

THE BOSS



OWNER AND BARGE IN THEIR SUNDAY BEST

DO YOU SEE THE FOUR GIRLS AT WORK?

ATALANTE'S CABIN

requires skill. At the end of a day's toil you've got something to show which is good to look at. While your hands are busy your mind lives in expectation, knowing that you are getting ready for something thrilling—the life of a boat at sea. The work is never too absorbing, and you can follow your thoughts leisurely. Your activity puts a claim on your muscles, so that you feel nicely tired in the evenings. You get pleasure out of handling tools in the proper manner and according to ways adopted after centuries of practice. Then, by an understanding which is better than mere sympathy, a feeling grows slowly within you which is a pass into the brotherhood of craftsmen.

Whether small or big, a boat seems always to need the same kind of treatment. The sky-lights have to be made water-tight with caulking and putty in the coamings; the deck and the hull painted; new ratlines fitted on the shrouds—they stick and smell nicely of tar while you do the seizings at their ends. Sitting in the bos'un's chair I scraped and varnished the stout mast full of long cracks . . . From my perch up there I could see the main channel where small boats swung with the tide, and I gazed freely on the flat piece of land that separated us from the high sea . . .

Tactfully Dooley would enquire how I was getting on. Yes, I knew how to sharpen a blunt scraper, and how to use the serving mallet with the big twine. On the bathroom bulkhead I could spread our thick 'Velure' white enamel correctly, and I was used to removing a loose hair with the brush.

But I had to watch how a topmast is swayed properly, and I studied what is peculiar to a barge. With the exception of the mast, our biggest spar was the sprit, which supports the mainsail in the same way a gaff does on a sloop; but unlike a gaff, the sprit starts from the deck at the foot of the mast. It is controlled by wire braces, called 'vangs' in the bargee's lingo. Near the steering-wheel, the mainsheet—with its block nearly as big as my head,—works on a

traveller sliding on a horse, a round beam traversing the width of the deck.

After two or three days on board, I felt that the barge, as well as the Captain, had accepted me; I was certain of it when she no longer placed, so to speak, her beams or her girders just in the way of my forehead, and when she no longer caught my toes in her many cleats, leads or bollards. I walked about her in the dark, I was now familiar enough to call her 'the old tub' and I did not fear to antagonise her by looking carefully at her rotting kelson. We decided to treat her scourge with pitch.

On the day of the Colonel's visit, loud shouts warned us of his arrival. As soon as he came out of the shed we heard: "Hay! hay! *Volunteer* ahoy!" Then, seating himself on the roof of his barge-yacht, buffeted by the wind and sheltering his ear, he listened to Dooley's report. He came aft, scratching the deck's blue paint with his shuffling heels, while I went on splicing the dinghy's painter.

"How are you getting on?" he greeted me. "The Captain tells me he has never seen such a hard worker." "Well Sir, it is what I said only yesterday to old Stone. He told me to chuck scraping the oars because it was late . . . I said I worked for my pleasure and not to get pay." "Ah! Ah! good gal . . . Well done you! One volunteer is worth ten pressed men!"

With these words he went back to a lady who was waiting near the gangway. She was Mrs. Shawe-Taylor, not a paying-guest but a friend who was to sail with us. She was tall and rather nice, and her name was Amy. Obviously she did not know what to make of me. They soon went away to catch their train.

I discovered I was happy living from hour to hour—I envied nothing and nobody. My health was better—though I had not gone South as the doctor had advised. Also I was earning money while learning more about boats.

During the quiet evenings Dooley sometimes told me about far-away places or old ships he had handled. In

Sydney harbour he had seen small open boats competing in most spectacular regattas. They carried so much sail that the crews hung on to windward like living counter-ballasts, and when they capsized, the men did not seem to worry about the sharks which were everywhere. Or Dooley would make me laugh with Irish stories of smuggled whisky. I listened eagerly to his talk, which was new to me.

My main distractions were found ashore: they were boats or men. Of boats there were plenty, all of them interesting (except for the shapeless motor-yachts). Next to us was the straight-stemmed *Vera*, built of teak, as strong as steel, and the elegant copper-sheathed *Palatina*. I liked studying hulls, finding the angle from which their lines, as it were, melted into each other, making a harmonious whole; and from that angle hulls sometimes reminded me of the shapes of fish; the *Vera* was like a strong tunny-fish. I loved loafing in Aldous's shipyard, looking for my dream-ship. I made notes of gadgets in the riggings, of ways of storing cumbersome anchors. I crawled on board these slumbering ships, and touched with my palm their smooth decks. I learnt the trick of opening a sky-light through which I jumped down on to the mess-table. Then, like a pirate stealing the experience others have already gathered and put into shape, I would explore the silent cabins. Space-saving, comfort, seamanship, I wanted to remember every good idea for the day I could use it in our own boat. It is not the sea we learn to love, but the ships, I thought. They are what give meaning to the moving waters. The sea, after all, is beautiful to look at in its various moods. You can describe it, paint it, photograph it—left to yourself you can play with it on the shore, you can enter it, even swim in it. All these pastimes, however, soon come to an end. But give me any kind of thing that floats, and then the fun begins—fun which can last a day, a year, or a lifetime. Each one of them a small home in itself, these many craft laid up in the yard were a different solution of the same problem—how to turn a hollow hull into a few cabins! Nearly all of them were capable of

sailing to the other end of the world. How thrilling it was to think of all that they could say! . . . I still remember how excited I was when I explored the interior of a Brixham trawler called, I think, *Marie Marguerita*, which belonged to Arnold Bennett; she was strong, and so lovely down below . . . just the yacht to take me to the South Pacific! I dreamed that with her I was discovering those isles of beauty where men have not made a nonsensical mess of their world.

My second distraction was provided by men, as I have said; they were few. Some deck-hands never moved out of the hulls they were fitting out: they belonged to their tiny self-contained world. One might have compared them with kinds of human shell-fish. By observing them at work, I always learned something.

The store-keeper was fun, in the middle of his dark and dead world. Every item of his inventory only came to life if a skipper dropped in, took it away, and used it. Then at last the varnish would shine on the boom, the chamois leather caress the sliding hatch, the scrubber clean the deck, the coil of rope become a halliard hoisting the throat, the fenders crunch between hull and quay, the blocks' sheaves roll and creak, the burgee fly at the top of the mast, the gimballed lamp swing, the compass needle move slowly in its binnacle, the sling strain on the gaff, the bucket fall into the water and the anchor chain rush out of the hawse-pipe.

I spent most of my free time at the forge. All day long on the *Volunteer* I heard the clear sound of the anvil and there I could see how the hammer made a little double rebound every time it came down. The warmth of the coal fire was cheerful in the chilly weather. And of course there was Jones—and it was a joy to see him work. He was a tall, lanky sort of chap, so lithe that you thought he was weak until he wielded the big hammer. An apron of black shiny leather girded his thin hips. In his long face, so like an El Greco painting, only the whites of his eyes were undarkened by coal dust. He handled without effort a heavy

piece of iron like a boom collar; with the help of his long pincers he adroitly kept the glowing ring aslant the anvil while shaping the tender metal with easy rhythmic blows of his hammer. When the hot iron was sizzling in a tub of water, we would look at each other. Maybe it was not him I liked so much as the skill with which he did things. In the same way I love to see a ship's carpenter adjust a new rudder-post or bolt a keel on a yacht. Jones was a silent kind of man, but his eyes told me that he liked my company. And I was glad when there was work to be done for us at the forge. I worked the pedal of the bellows, and Jones showed me how to wield the hammer; one day I even worked on our anchor shackle. Jones and his apprentice were kind, they did not laugh at me and I felt proud of my new activity. Every time I left, he would say: "Coming again soon?" I thought maybe I ought not to go to the forge so often. Then the day came when I said: "To-morrow we put to sea . . ." In his halting dull speech he spoke at greater length than he had ever done before: ". . . Pity I am not single. We could have been quite all right together. . . . Well, I guess we have been good pals all the same . . ."

The last time I saw him was two years later, on board the *Vera* at Cowes; I was just a silly guest, and he was a smart mate in white flannels. We smiled shyly at each other, shook hands, blushed a bit . . . and parted.

As for old Stone, the yard's owner, he did all he could to make me talk. Seemingly I behaved most of the time like a paid-hand, and in front of him the Colonel had called me his cabin-boy. But during a whole sunny day I would lie on deck reading a book and Dooley did not force me back to work. Also in Geneva I knew the son of his old client, Pourtales-Marcet, to whom he had been sending first-class masts. I had told Stone how I used to hoist my yacht on the slip at Port-Marcet because it was just 300 yards beyond the Creux de Genthod, where my home stood by the lake-side. From these facts Stone must have deduced that I was well off. On the other hand I ate my meals in the galley with

the captain and with Revell, the old steward who had joined us . . .

One day Stone was especially polite to me. And the same day not only the deck-hand of the neighbouring *Vera*, but even her owner unexpectedly spoke to me, inviting me to dinner . . . Something had changed, but what? I was just the same, nails broken, hair unkempt, smelling of the turpentine which I had used to remove the red-lead stains from my hands.

Dooley knew the answer to my question. To get rid of Stone's enquiries, he had spoken of my friends Ralph Stock and Alain Gerbault, adding that like them I was a writer. Could that be the reason for their changed attitude? And why should they suddenly be nice because they thought I wrote books? What did it matter who my friends were? Surely they made no difference to what I was myself? It was only a small example of the influence snobbery has in the world and without which little can be achieved: people do not care so much for you, but for your influential friends.

Of course the whole story was farcical, and Dooley, with a smile in his eye, knew it; but it was a good joke to dispose of Stone. I—write a book when I could hardly finish a letter home? I would never be so silly! There were already too many useless books published every day. I had thought, it is true, to write a log of our cruise to the South Seas (a cruise of which we had secretly dreamed) because it might help others who lacked courage to sail away.

No, writing was a gift I did not possess. It was a mistake to sit down for months putting pen to paper, instead of *doing* things . . . which was surely a more direct, real and satisfying way of living than writing about the past. . . .

I felt it was only the present that mattered. It was important to live fully, to do things with my own hands, to think my own thoughts and live for what I thought was worth while. Living through the imagination and talking about things before they were done, was to be avoided . . . I did not realise then that meditation has its positive side and that

one could be 'valuably' active while thinking or writing. Foolishly, I believed it meant looking towards the past, a sign that your energy was ebbing, no longer pushing you towards the future, the beginning of death itself.

I only thought about getting ready for a long life at sea. There I would be in continual touch with the reality of the sun, the wind, the waves, and those who draw a livelihood from them—away from the hypocrisy and artificiality of a town.

"Have you suffered, starved, and triumphed, grovelled
down, yet grasped at glory,
Grown bigger in the bigness of the whole?
'Done things' just for the doing, letting babblers tell the
story,
Seeing through the nice veneer the naked soul?"*

From the *Volunteer's* deck a red setting sun was seen half-hidden by dark-blue clouds. The pink rays diffused by the mist bathed the creek and the yards in an atmosphere of mother-of-pearl. The air was milder: it reminded me that the land of fields and trees, which I had almost forgotten, was beginning to live again.

* R. W. Service.

CHAPTER IV

At Sea as Cabin-Boy

We had to float the barge. Stone wanted us to wait for the next tide; everything went wrong, everybody shouted. Dooley lost his head. Mechanically he coiled hawsers while we drifted down on *Palatina*, dragging along with us the two anchored fishing-smacks to which we had made fast our stern lines.

Though he cursed mightily, the Colonel took everything as a matter of course. If this meant that the *Volunteer* was used to such manœuvring, surely I was bound to die of heart failure! I prayed that hardy guests or pupils might turn up, for we were very short-handed, with only the Colonel, Dooley and myself on deck. Occasionally Condor, the mechanic, gave us a hand when his engine was behaving properly; and slow-moving Revell, the steward, climbed out of his galley once or twice to work on a winch. Mrs. Shawe-Taylor stood motionless, indulging in a kind of amused sneer. During one desperate attempt to avoid bumping into something she helped the Colonel to turn his wheel more quickly. Several times our owner had queer and unsuccessful dealings with an iron T bar coming out of the deck near the wheel, and which was supposed to control the gear box.

Happily old Stone was on board; at last after he had made sure that Dooley was incapable of deciding what to do, he took command. At high water we heaved and pushed ourselves off the ground. The wind was blowing like blue blazes and I was alarmed to see what power it had in our heavy rigging, encumbered with topsail and mainsail brailed along the mast. With leeboards up, our enormous bulk offered no resistance of its own; we were flung here and there

by the wind and the fast ebbing tide. I did not dare imagine what might happen in the days ahead.

But the great thing was that we were afloat, and because I had fallen into the habit of living "high and dry", it seemed incredible to me. I kept rushing up the companion-way to look at the surrounding water.

We rode at anchor, not far from the ship-yard. Our old hull no more sagged on the hard; she was alive and buoyant again; jambs and lintels had fallen back into their right positions so that the doors shut; and lavatories worked properly. We had a white light half-way up our stay. The water made gurgling noises along the hull, not more than six inches from my ear. Though the sea in the creek was as smooth as a skating rink, I knew we were no longer aground: I was not quite steady on my legs, and felt as if I were slightly drunk, a feeling that would only last for some twenty-four hours.

I lay in my narrow bunk, so tired that I could not go to sleep . . . and I would have to get up early next morning. I had spent the day rushing wildly all over the place, carrying messages from Dooley to the Colonel and vice-versa (wisely omitting curses as well as unkind qualifications), diving below to Condor to say: "For God's sake put her full astern . . ." jumping in the dinghy to take a line to a mid-stream buoy; telling the Colonel when his rudder was amidships; running to the bobstay to save at the last second the bowsprit of a silly little yacht moored in our way; ranging the muddy, slippery anchor-chain as fast as Dooley and Revell heaved it round the windlass—because we had picked up a bad mooring . . . Patron of all sailors, what a night-mare it was!

To end the day, I had dined with the Colonel and Amy, on oysters, soles and turkey. Revell had brought in the dishes and afterwards we had done the washing-up together.

It was the 8th of May. We got up at five o'clock in the morning and we began heaving up the anchor so that we

could be off with the tide; I ran aft to the Colonel to tell him that we were "up and down". The motor started after coughing cheerfully half a dozen times, and without any more mishap, southward bound, we said good-bye to sleepy Brightlingsea.

A good south wind blew while we loosened the mizen and the mainsail, shouting to each other: "Come into the wind, Colonel, otherwise we can't haul on the main-sheet . . ." This was easily done by taking two turns on the little winch. What next? "Hoist the staysail . . . Quick, take off the stove funnel before it is carried away!" "And what about the leeboards? We had better lower the one on the lee side as we beat to windward . . ."

In the meantime we passed our silent, motionless friends, the Bar buoy and the Eagle buoy; then we tacked through the Spitway. Dooley did the steering while we went below to have our breakfast. The table was unscrewed and swung, so that one had to be careful not to lean on the checkered white and blue oil-cloth. The saloon where I was now to live was spacious and bright. It filled the central part of the hold and the whole roof had been converted into a skylight. There were racks of books on either side, chest-of-drawers near the door leading aft, and oilskins hanging under the companion. On the portside the ice-box stood next to the writing-table where the log book and the visitor's book lay with the parallel rule . . . As for the charts, they lived under the settees. The bulkheads were ornamented with amusing coloured caricatures by Gilray; and the Colonel said that his "missus" did not like these shocking prints at Pythouse, his country house, so he had brought them on board. (I remember one called "She stoops to conquer".)

While I tidied the breakfast things or the cabins, my thoughts were on deck, and I was conscious of every time we went about.

I felt uncomfortable; we didn't swing along evenly. Again and again the barge luffed too much. First the staysail flapped threateningly over the fo'c'sle, and then the clew

of the mainsail with its mammoth block jerked noisily at the traveller.

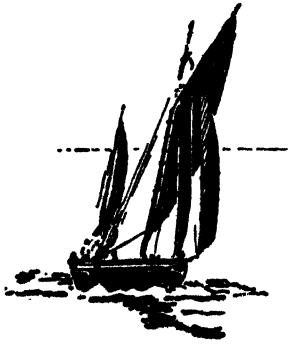
Back on deck I found the wind so strong that I had to tie a scarf over my hair. Only the windward leeboard was down, which did no good to anybody. Once more Dooley brought her too close to the wind to a standstill; then he put the helm up, so that the next gust of wind caught her abeam with no speed on. Such a strain on the old barge caused her planking to leak; her bilge water came over the floor-board and she had to be pumped out.

Dooley, it was obvious, had no instinctive feeling for a sailing craft. He was steering her by compass, which is silly when a boat is close-hauled. "Give her to me . . ." I proposed as casually as possible; Dooley did not know that I had never had a wheel in my hands.

Dooley went forward to study the chart. The Colonel had gone aft to sleep. Amy had come on deck but found it much too cold and windy. I was alone.

The engine still chugged along, fouling the air with a musty smell of burnt paraffin. Every now and then the exhaust-pipe got choked by the swell.

That is how I came to be sailing one day off the East coast, steering the *Volunteer* among the sandbanks into the Thames estuary, off Southend . . .



CHAPTER V

A Squall

In the main channel many cargo boats come and go. The tide is with us and we are doing eight knots. The lee rail keeps disappearing in the foam; and as for the davits holding our two dinghies, I don't want to look at them too much. Raindrops sting my face. At last Dooley agrees to scandalise the mainsail, which folds into a big brown bundle along the mast like a stage curtain.

The Colonel is trying to keep his balance by holding on to the weather vane. He smokes a colossal pipe curved like a saxophone and fitted with a silver lid. He has decided to anchor for a while, as Amy is feeling ill and we are to land her.

We glide past the pier and drop anchor just beyond it so that we shall not have too far to row.

It is hard work lowering the jib and the staysail because the wind, still as strong as ever, wants to play with them. Respite . . . What a sudden peace in the motionless saloon! My hands burn from handling the leeboards tackle, the coarse hemp of the brails and the damp main-sheet.

Are we drifting? No, we are still opposite the same buoy, the anchor is holding and we can eat our cold lunch in peace. The Colonel is charming. He is to pick up our guests at Dover (no young men for me, he adds with a noisy laugh) and then cross over to gamble at the Dieppe Casino, he says. He also wants to do some tunny fishing in the North Sea "just to see if there is a tunny strong enough to carry him off."

But now, "Up with the anchor. . . !" Dooley, Revell, and I work at the windlass, while the pawls make a clicking

sound on the sprocket. Condor is priming his engine. We need it as we start head to wind. The Owner is at the wheel, bald-headed, cigar alight.

Just as we get the anchor atrip a frightful squall strikes us, breaking away the stops of our furled foresails, which are half-hoisted, bargee fashion. They flap so mightily that they increase our drift, turning our stem to leeward at once . . . to leeward where the pier lies! The engine makes hardly any headway against such a gale. The Colonel is lost, he yells as loud as he can to Condor; with his rudder completely over he has no steerage way. The mizen-boom sheet, fastened on to the rudder, parts: the mizen sail can no longer bring us into the wind.

My eyes are riveted on the pier's head, which seems to come on us like an express train. We work furiously, trying to strangle the foresails so that the motor will have more power. Pier and barge seem to converge inevitably, pitilessly! There will be such a shock and such a crash on this pier head which so far has been friendly to me. I hardly dare keep my eyes open . . . (Oh, how I wish that my beautiful ski-ing photos, down below, were in a watertight box. . . !) Sideways we flash past the foot of the pile-work. There is not a cigar's length between our rudder and the foremost pile . . . Under the pier the black water is splashing madly, like the many tiny spuming volcanoes into which the sea is churned on Japanese paintings.

The danger leaves me limp with emotion. We set the sails and steer for the south-east, where the Nore lightship looks sad and abandoned under the rain. Our topsail has ripped near the clew, and I am glad we have to take it down for the time being, as it is still blowing half a gale. As we get nearer the Kentish hills it becomes calmer, and at seven p.m. after a very full day, we drop our anchor off Margate.

Near us are two loaded barges, low down in the water, waiting for the turn of the tide, the *Dongola* and the *Michigan*.

The peace is complete now, and tranquil waters surround

us. Though the lights of Margate twinkle softly in the darkness not far from us, I feel cut off from everything. A halliard is tapping regularly against the mast. Vaguely I realise the presence of London in the west, London, the biggest port in the world, London like a magnet drawing all sorts of ships unceasingly; all those which sail up-stream in a slow procession, will return as soon as they have been emptied and refilled . . . always called, always sent back . . . spat out once more by the Thames mouth!

Early next morning we leave on an ebb tide. The weather is foul and so cold that I put on everything I can find. How good the cup of tea is that Revell brings me on deck . . . What a nice shipmate he is; I am surprised by his kindness. He has a wooden face thickened by a heavy jowl, tiny black eyes in which I can read nothing, and eyebrows for ever making an inverted "V" on his furrowed brow.

Because of a southerly head-wind we "proceed under power", sailing round the Longnose buoy, and by the time we are off the North Foreland, we are riding an enormous sea; the propeller is out of the water most of the time, accelerating wildly, until it dives again into the resistance of the sea; it becomes a regular see-saw game which sends the sprit jerking about. A few miles to the west we can see the greyness of Ramsgate houses on the land. How dull this coast is compared with the coves and pine-trees of the Mediterranean I know. . . .

Wind and tide being against us, we anchor off Deal for lunch, and there for a blessed hour I sleep in the folds of the staysail, on top of the galley, but not without dreaming that we are stranded on the Goodwin Sands . . .

Slowly, under power, we creep out of the Downs, pass near the South Foreland, and soon we are snug in Dover harbour, busy grey-and-white Dover with its famous cliffs which I see for the first time.

CHAPTER VI

Dover Interlude

Next day we entered the Granville dock because our bent cross tree had to go to the blacksmith. I had watched it happen two days ago, and I knew that from then on I should trust nothing but my own judgment. Until we found ourselves alongside the quay I went through varying depths of shame. The Colonel was at the helm (I had no desire to take charge of her, knowing nothing about the reactions of the propeller next to our queer rudder), the harbour master was pointing at our berth, and we made straight for the wall. The Colonel battling with the iron clutch, the *Volunteer* described weird antics in the middle of her watery paddock, while we all rushed about armed with fenders to check the impact of wood on stone . . . The dock people ashore gave vent to their thoughts by strings of: "Oh God! Oh God!" It was too much for me. I was thankful to have nothing more to do with the *Volunteer* as I jumped into the dinghy in time to save it from being crushed like a bug . . . Oh, Miette my former shipmate, only you could have understood what I went through . . . When I thought of how proud we were when we entered Antibes harbour under sail before an easterly gale, with the old salts looking at us! We never even consulted each other or made a false move before we were alongside. . . .

We spent a few days at Dover and on the whole I liked them. I enjoyed solitary sailing in the *Jasper*, our 12-foot dinghy, not only because it was fun to be so near the water, heeling under the smallest gusts of the breeze, but also because there the Colonel could not shout for me every second minute.

I never tired of looking at the preening gulls and imagining myself one of them, nicely buoyed up by the water. It was interesting to study every movement of the Dover-Calais steamers too, when one realised how fast and skilfully they manœuvred in the harbour. How hurried were their efforts to link up England with the continent! But even here, where the Channel was at its narrowest, the strip of water was wide enough to prevent the islanders from keeping pace with every new thought fermenting on the continent. Was this subconscious feeling of being isolated from Europe the origin of English aloofness? Who could tell? It is perhaps a good thing to be aloof—not buffeted about too often by new impulses: it might give a race time to grow deep roots. . . . But whatever its origin this general quietude has often puzzled me.

One afternoon, returning towards the barge, I noticed with foreboding two old gentlemen wearing white yachting caps (a kind of headgear I don't like). They were our first paying-guests; one of them was eighty-three years old and his wife who accompanied him was seventy. Bother! The second coat of paint which the deck needed could not be applied next day with so many landlubbers about! I had hoped they would not join the barge till she was ready to leave Dover. Luckily their cabins were in order, no holes in the sheets or the towels, and hardly a leak in the skylights. . . . The next day we expected another lady just as old as the first one, so Dooley called our barge *The Antiquarium.*

From the quay the Colonel was calling. He wanted my company while he enjoyed what I discovered was one of his typical pastimes: looking at the tired crowds coming off the mail-boats. So we went and studied them: the Britishers, glad I suppose, to be understood now that they could speak their mother-tongue once more, and glad no doubt to see again their pale and grey country. They passed one after the other, the bony spinster, the well-ordered family in dark blue mackintoshes, with their kodaks handy, the civil servant, straight from the boat at Marseilles, the business man holding

his attaché-case, the smart lady with rug, fur coat and pearl necklace followed by the steward carrying her hat boxes . . . the gentleman of leisure, at ease in his tweed overcoat. The aliens were herded through another door, following the pointing arrows; some looked shy, perhaps for the first time in England, perhaps going to dodge the Home Office regulations concerning their work as waiters, musicians, nurses, companions. Some with gaudy ties, some with queer wooden boxes, some with yellowish skins. Occasionally we noticed somebody like a French dressmaker, smartly moving about, and the Colonel knew how to give a little whistle of appreciation. One of my Owner's main amusements was to see how many old Etonian ties he could pick up in the crowd; I have seen him stop an unknown man to ask him most charmingly, if they had been at school the same year. . . . There, in our most disreputable sea-clothes, enjoying ourselves like youngsters, we made fun of the most serious people . . .

At Dover we went on a shopping tour I shall never forget. But first I must describe my boss.

Because of his *embonpoint* he could not tie his shoes, and his laces hung loose all day long; from far away one could hear his noisy shuffle; his socks were always worn out at the heels, and at each step he took one saw something rather like a tennis ball flash out of the shoe. There were burns in the front of his coat in two places, due I should think to fallen bits of tobacco. And with a cigar he had made two ventilation holes in his old green felt hat. It seemed as if our walk might be a long one, so I knelt in the middle of the road to tie his shoe-laces. Further on he met a chimney-sweep as black as a raven; he took his hat off, saying to him: "Well my man, how is your old father to-day?"

I decided the Colonel was putting me to the test to find out how soon I would be shocked. . . . But he could never win at such a game because I was as good as he. Just then my toe began to ache; and I determined to do something about it. "Wait a minute," I told him, "I can't go on like

this!" So, casually sitting down on the footpath, I proceeded to cut a square out of the end of my canvas shoe, with the enormous sailor's knife I always carried. The Colonel showed no astonishment, but a man standing by remarked in an amused way: "No ladies' knife, what?" "Thank God she is not a lady, she is a damned hard worker," replied the Colonel.

After this remark—which was not perhaps a compliment, we went on to buy a rubber bath-mat for our barge. We also bought a pair of gum-boots for me, because the Colonel was afraid I would catch cold if I kept on scrubbing the deck bare-foot. And we chose four enamelled tin mugs to be used as tooth-glasses. They were tied together by a string which the Colonel fastened to the top part of his hazel-stick, to avoid carrying a parcel. I also received a knife because the Colonel had broken my old blade trying to open oysters.

So we went back, down Dover High Street, feeling mischievous, independent and unknown, free to glide away and vanish over the horizon at a moment's notice.

During those queer days I had one idea: to strengthen my position so that a certain demand I wanted to make would be granted. As our three p.g.s could be of little use on deck, I would certainly be kept rushing up and down all day, giving a hand now to Dooley, now to Revell. Of course I never had time to mend or wash, to read or write, which was more than I could bear. I simply had to be promoted deck-hand. But first I had to make myself indispensable to the Colonel so that he could not say: "I think I can do without you, for after all, your cabin would bring me money if I could let it. . . ." Another thing was that Miette had not yet confirmed the purchase of our small boat; so that in the meantime I was glad of such a good berth.

CHAPTER VII

Along the South Coast

Most of the time under sail and power, the *Volunteer* crept slowly along the land, making use of favourable tides, dropping her hook in shallow waters at night. We passed in sight of of low, desolate, sandy Dungeness headland, where the houses near the shore looked like cubes forgotten by giants' children.

Fairlight was a happier landmark. We came near the hill covered with blossoming shrubs, and stopped for lunch. A few white tents were pitched there and suddenly it felt very summer-like . . . so much so that a swim seemed most desirable. At lunch Dickins, the p.g., teased the cabin-boy because she had no time to eat properly while waiting on others and clearing away the plates. When running to the galley she kept on missing the gist of the stories told by the Colonel, who was busy amusing his guests. With a good deal of mimicry he described one of his jobs during the Great War, when he had been the only man able successfully to handle a gang of conscientious objectors. . . . "The trick was easy," he said, "they worked in a quarry; I used to sit at the top of it throwing stones at the idlers. . . ."

The liqueur brandy was good on board; so were the fat Aden cigarettes the Colonel smoked. I didn't like getting up early in the morning and I needed nine hours' sleep. . . . So playing "shut-eye" for an hour after lunch was just what I wanted. When anchored at sea, rocking slowly with the swell, the barge beat a slow, sleepy rhythm: the rudder balanced heavily on its pintles which had too much play in their gudgeons, the sprit creaked plaintively, and the leeboards came flapping against the planking with a deep

thump: their enormous iron bolt pinned through the width of the barge had worked itself a little loose.

Sailing at night was queer and I was teaching myself to find it a joke. I admit that the tides play tricks and that you never know how many miles you actually make on the ground, however fast you think you are going. But though we had shore lights to steer by, that night everybody pretended we were in a different place. "It's Hastings!" "No fear, it's Bexhill!" "Impossible I tell you. . . ." Safely moored, we went to sleep with this problem unanswered. And next morning at daylight, with the help of the sailing directions, we found we were a stone's-throw from St. Leonards. We did not go ashore and nobody could say what had tempted William the Conqueror to land at such a place. . . .

The straight, white cliff of Beachy Head was good to look at with the toy-like lighthouse nestling at its foot. The sea here was much frequented; I counted many tramps and oil tankers around us either making a landfall or taking their departure.

The wind being right aft, the cabin-boy had the bright idea of loosening the squaresail and stopping the engine. Then at last could the beauty of the peaceful day reign serene. The sea sparkled, turned by the sun into a rare dark royal-blue on which the white enamel of a small yacht shone like a precious pearl.

Like a stone thrown out of a field, a black steamer dashed out from the shore at Newhaven. On the downs I was shown an expensive girl's school where every boarder had a sitting-room and came with her maid, I was told. It seemed to me to be a bad sort of education. . . . All I knew was that none of the princesses up there could be as happy as I was at the helm of my leaking barge.

And to crown the day, the Colonel said to me from his armchair on deck: "I have just written out a wire asking for a cabin-boy: from now on you are promoted deck-hand."

The endless sea-front of Brighton and Hove provided no

beauty: a few six-storeyed houses and gas-works were the outstanding sights.

Later on we passed near Shoreham-Southwick. How little did I guess that from there I would one day say good-bye to the land, bound for the South Seas. . . .

In the morning a mist turned the face of the earth into something delicate and rare; and in that light the surroundings of Portsmouth looked most unwarlike; grey destroyers matched perfectly the vanishing mist. After the Looe, Dickins was at the helm steering—with fantasy, not to say more. The barge nosed towards every point of the compass. Though at these times Dooley as a rule did nothing but sigh, on this occasion he swore healthily! We were in the course of a warship which did not know on which side to overtake us.

On our port bow the Isle of Wight came out of the sky, a green patch for eyes tired by the glare of the sea. Ryde was a lovely golden spot on the shore, just like some of our quiet Swiss towns on the lake. And I felt at home when I discovered many country-places like the ones I had sailed by so often: here also wide lawns came to the water's edge, and stately trees framed stately mansions. Green and damp Norris castle reminded me of the château de Beauregard on the Savoyan coast; but here the yachts moored off shore were much bigger than ours. For the first time I looked eagerly at one of the big cutters, the King's *Britannia*, not yet Marconi-rigged. As we passed her the Colonel ordered our blue ensign to be dipped. I read the names of some lovely hulls, like *Carlotta* and *Dolphina;* and I learned that to be really smart a yacht's name must end with an "a". I was trying to identify a big topsail schooner, when Dooley told me it was Lord Brassey's *Sunbeam*, well known for her cruises; the last time he had seen her was in Australia. Her name conveyed nothing to me then, but I was going to know her better because of her mate's smiling dark blue eyes.

Soon after landing Amy Shawe-Taylor and her son, we sailed across the Solent to the Southampton river. Navigation

was not so easy. There was the Bramble Bank to avoid, and the currents were queer ones because the channels created double tides. I tried to remember everything in case I might one day have to sail my own boat through these waters. How pleased, I wonder, would I have been then to know what was going to take place later: lovely *Atalante* arriving from Lorient, tacking against half a gale, being piled up on top of the Itchen mud! I would have blushed in advance, ashamed of myself. It is true that *Atalante* was going to draw nearly eight feet, against the barge's two.

The colossal bulk of the *Olympic* passed us, dwarfing not only the flat *Volunteer*, but also one of the 'big class' racing yachts, the *Nyria* under jury rig. Many a big ship, tramp or liner, was moored on one side of the river; some pink-turbanned Indian sailors leaned over the rail of one of them. They were the Rotten Row, said Dooley. We passed off Hythe, where I could read the name of Kemp ship-yard, and then not far from the Royal Pier our anchor went down, the chain jumping lively round the windlass. I sculled Dickins and Furber ashore in the dinghy as quickly as possible, because they had a train to catch—a good riddance for the present.

I stood on the landing-stage. Many perfect dinghies with smart sailors in them were clustered round the steps, and I guessed that a big green cutter must be the *Shamrock*. Near at hand in the dock, the three masts of the *Kallisto* built the sort of picture I like . . . but all the time I had something on my mind. Then, I knew. I felt such a wave of joy and life bubble into me, that I had to sit down on the quay to think it over.

Because our "gents" had been in such a hurry I hadn't had time to put shoes on—and I had just landed bare-foot out of a dinghy, a mere deck-hand on board a most unconventional barge-yacht. . . .

But eight months ago, shy, tired, not understanding a word of English (though I could pronounce a few sentences) and persuading myself that I was a French teacher, I had

landed exactly here, stepping out of the night steamer from "Lee Haver" as they called it.

Crossing from Le Havre had been lovely because it meant a long stretch on the sea, this sea I was so keen to meet personally. I shall always remember that first night in the Channel. Below there was a sickening smell of disinfectant. I much preferred staying on deck, especially as it was a foul night and it was exciting to experience a storm at sea. Unobtrusively I had crawled to the upper deck, and, clinging for all I was worth to the bridge railing, I rode through that battle of the elements. The wind was turned into sea, a salty liquid trickled down my face, my hair was torn away while I searched the horizon for other boats' lights. My thoughts were with the helmsman, looking out for the biggest waves. . . . It was grand. "No passenger is allowed on deck . . ." I heard a paternal voice say near me. Blast, I thought, can't he leave me when I am so happy. "It is all right," I said, "I am not a passenger, I am a sailor." A silence took place with only the wind howling. "If you are a sailor you know you must obey the captain," said the invisible man. Such a reasonable reply left no alternative but to obey.

I did not sleep that night; at dawn through my porthole I saw the Nab tower. And with longing eyes I admired the famous Solent which I had to leave behind me.

I was heading for a few sad months in my life, then. But happily this bad dream was sunk for ever in the fogs of the Irish Sea. . . . I was now once more in Southampton, but this time free, strong, heading for the sunny south, with no immediate worries. And I admired the 800-ton three-masted schooner *Kallisto*.

I was going to have two free days alone in the *Volunteer*, with breakfast in bed and sun-baths on deck; then I wanted to inspect the neighbouring yachts; and go with the over-board motor-dinghy up the Itchen to visit the ship-yards. I had to look for our future dream-ship, either a Norwegian

double-ender or a Bristol pilot-boat. The craft Miette was buying in Marseilles would be cheap, and only used during our training in the Mediterranean next summer; we had to make sure that with two watches of two girls each, we could sail long stretches without getting tired. . . . After that cruise I would have to find a job for next winter. Schemes had been worked out already, letters sent to winter-sport palaces, to the Alpine Club, and to the Paris Golfers Club where a secretary was wanted. I asked myself if I ought not to take advantage of my stay at So'ton to get in touch with yacht-owners likely to be spending the coming winter at sea. There might be a job for me somewhere? I felt too lazy to bother much, though now and then I had a few pricks of conscience because I had not made the most of my visit to Southampton.

It took us three days to reach Weymouth to the West. We hoisted sails south of Calshot Spit and then tacked through the Solent, racing against another barge, the *Scone*. We both dropped our hooks off Yarmouth, a lovely little harbour. I could hear the birds twittering in the trees, and see the green beech-leaves glistening. Yarmouth reminded me of Yvoire, and this very lake-like atmosphere of the Solent made me feel homesick. At Yarmouth even the gasworks seemed beautiful!

After the tide had turned we went on, near the land and under power, passing a solitary red fort; then the coast became more abrupt, with pine-trees on the slopes, and the island ended with the white Needles spread in the sea towards the setting sun.

The sails were loosened, the engine stopped as we passed a liner. Night fell, I steered the barge a bit north of the Anvil lighthouse, and on we foamed with the wind on our quarter, lights twinkling on shore where Christchurch and Bournemouth ought to be. Gum-boots were a good protection against the cold, and my pipe kept a little heart of warmth alive in the middle of my hand. Dooley was studying the chart somewhere below. I was on top of the owner's skylight

(if I wanted to I could hear him snore) and the barge was so steady that the helm could be lashed nearly all the time. I felt good after a happy day.

About Poole, where we spent the next day, I remember nothing, whereas I can still see in my memory the race we sailed through, off St. Albans Head. Running before a fresh easterly wind, the *Volunteer* gybed unexpectedly, and we rushed to make fast the windward vang, afraid that the sprit might be carried away. How I hate these tide-rips and choppy seas which give you no warning of overtaking squalls! When the burgee is too heavy to be helpful, one must rely on the sensitiveness in one's neck to tell one when the wind is veering. I steered with set jaws for a while. We could not afford to have anything carried away which might knock a hole in our rotten hull. "The barge is a sieve" we said when pumping the same amount of bilge water by hand every day.

Far in the south, Portland Bill advanced into the sea; later the long breakwaters of Portland Harbour became visible, sheltering a few warships. We whizzed through the bay, the nose of the *Volunteer* pointing at low black clouds. Some really bad weather was coming and I liked to feel Weymouth so near.

We entered right into the long, narrow harbour, brailed up the sails, avoided a few of the yachts moored in tiers on our portside; but before she was safe alongside the quay with her head turned to sea, the barge had bumped into three naval pinnaces at least . . . and there was a crowd looking at us, some of them giving advice concerning our lines!

It was amusing to be suddenly in a town, sheltered between a hill with a fort on one side, and high old houses just near us. We dined smartly with sherry, port and cigars at the Royal Dorset Yacht Club of which our owner was a member. He told me a bit about his life. We were not far from his house in Wiltshire from where his car was coming to fetch him as well as the suitcases filled with our washing; he said it was no use having the washing done here in town, as his

wife ran a laundry. She had also launched a big tennis club with eighteen courts. He always referred to her as "my missus". Sailing did not appeal to her because she was easily seasick; and she did not agree with the Colonel's yachting activity. It was an expensive hobby, for he was altering the barge all the time, adding a new engine, a longer bowsprit, a bigger topsail and so on. . . . At home, he said, his dear *Volunteer* was only called "that barge of yours," while "those people of yours" included the paying guests as well as the crew. I hated to think what would be said about me in his exalted household: Condor the mechanic during his last leave, must have spun many a yarn about our doings.

Next day we went to stay with Amy Shawe-Taylor, who lived not far off in an old priory, a low house of grey, weather-beaten stone covered with creeper. It was a sweet and peaceful place where the steeple of the church could be seen through shivering birch leaves; tulips looked unbelievably red in the juicy new grass, and ducklings with a brown, silky down seemed to be what my hand wanted most to stroke.

Norah, the daughter, had brought two friends from school; they discussed their mistresses at length—including the French one—little guessing that a French Mademoiselle sat facing them. . . .

All the time we were in Weymouth harbour, hoisted to its mast, the black cone of the weather-signal remained with its point turned down, which meant dirty winds from the east and south. As we wanted to go east, before going south to France where the boss had promised to take his p.g.s, we were forced to wait.

There, more than once, I looked thoughtfully at the black house opposite us. On the first floor was a school in which girls were taught shorthand and typewriting. They had watched me so many times that I went up the ratlines to find out what they were doing. Their occupation reminded me of my father: among other suggestions he had wanted me to become a typist; with three languages he had said I

could get a good job at the League of Nations. I had answered thoughtlessly that I wanted to deal with something more human than office work. I could not tell him about our grandiose sailing plans; and that if our dream-ship proved a failure I was thinking of joining the Hudson Bay Company or the Grenfell Mission in Labrador (because there I would find the sea and also the snow I loved. . . .)

Amy came back with her son, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Furber. The black cone was still up, the weather was disheartening; but now with the wind gone to the S.-W. we had no excuse for staying. So one morning we slipped our warps and I waved good-bye to the future typist-girls. At this moment our cabin-boy nearly fell overboard; and for the first time I saw Dooley take his cap off, showing a white, bold forehead. He waited, ready to dive. The boy was in the towed dinghy where he had to hook the falls of the davit into big rings. He had slipped and was hanging over the bow of the dinghy, still holding on to the fall; by pulling on the painter we helped him to get a better foothold, and told him to stop whining. He was not much use at sea. We were just passing a lovely Danish cargo boat as trim as a yacht. In the bay we crossed the *Jeanne* from Paimpol, under reefed mainsail, one of the very seaworthy yawls which bring potatoes from France.

That day I did not try to eat lunch, and I was not the only one to feel uncomfortable. I did not care to go below either and I spent the whole day on deck. We had only the mizen, the squaresail and the staysail on, so that everyone could steer easily. I rested on deck, looking at the water surging past us taking the form of crested hills and smooth valleys. . . .

In no time it seemed St. Alban's Head was left behind. Now we could see the Needles and two sailing-boats hove-to with the big lettering PILOT on their hulls. The Shingles, with their waters hideously foaming and hissing, were given a wide berth. On our port-side a big ketch and a three-masted barque had anchored in the shelter of Hurst Point.

We had time to go to Southampton, so we flew on and on, with this lovely feeling of having escaped from the roaring mouth of the bounding gale.

After Calshot our square-sail was of no more use; so I sent for Dooley, who had just had a late tea. He came on deck quite amused and soon told me that Mrs. Furber considered it most dangerous that I should be at the helm. "All right," I said to myself, "you just wait, my dear lady. Next time there is some tricky sailing, I'll let the others play about. . . . That will teach you to appreciate my qualities! Do you perhaps think that I am better at embroidering?"

We anchored at eight p.m. off the Royal Pier and we all ate Revell's well-deserved dinner: soles and liver with Brussels sprouts, which seemed to be a favourite menu. But the day's work was not ended yet.

In the sky the clearing had suddenly vanished; the wind whistled round the mast again, wailed in the air-shafts and threatened everything in its course. From the deck I had a careful look: we did not seem to have dragged according to the bearings I had taken. But half an hour later a vicious squall tore at us, making the mainsail bellow into its loosened brails and clack mightily in the night. Something had to be done at once. I shouted at Dooley who said he was going to have his supper first in peace . . . an answer which annoyed me because it was the wrong thing for a captain to say. Both to the Colonel and to him I said we were drifting slowly, and I suggested as gently as possible to bad tempered Dooley that we should take our second anchor out in the dinghy to be on the safe side.

"Oh no," said he, "it is quite unnecessary, the boat is only swinging round, she is just pulling at the slack of the anchor chain. . . ." "But Dooley, every minute you wait it will be more difficult to crawl away from our lee shore. . . ."

On deck once more, it was obvious we had drifted half the distance to the *Harbinger* and another yacht taking a lot of room with two anchors out on our starboard stern.

"Condor," said I through the skylight, "start your engine,

we can't stay here. . . ." "Wait," said Dooley, "I will have a look."

While he was on deck, the barge seemed to hold her ground; I looked a fool, though I knew it was madness to be so near the two yachts astern. Well, we could hardly hear what we were shouting at each other, so fierce was the wind! My only solace would be to say later: "I told you so. . . ."

I have not been more than one hour in my bunk when the old comedy—which could so easily turn into tragedy—begins. Dooley knocks at my deck ventilator: "All hands on deck . . . we are adrift. . . ." Condor starts the engine. The Colonel, in a dressing-gown, stands at the helm. Dooley runs about, uncertain what is going to happen. I know well that we are helpless now; it is too late, our tiny engine will never win against the head-wind. . . . God knows on what breakers we shall end! We heave in at the windlass, we can't see a thing except the dancing riding light of the *Harbinger* astern.

The anchor is not yet weighed, and the engine works full ahead trying to help our heaving up; but in spite of the helm hard over, we come broadside to the wind; we drift faster. "Dooley, we are on top of the yacht!" "Oh no, . . . miles away!" answers the poor fellow. No sooner said than we bump mightily with our port bow into the *Harbinger*. Our captain is simply hypnotised by his invisible anchor, since its chain is wedged against our stern. He shouts: "Astern," then: "Go ahead, Sir . . ." to the deaf Colonel who does not know what is what, and who stands petrified with cold at the wheel. We sweat all we can at the windlass, gaining slowly one click at a time.

At last the anchor is up and down, but what looms astern? "Dooley, we are on the pier!" "Oh no, it's miles away. . . ." "Not the one you see, you fool!" I yell to him, "Starboard astern. . . ." By the time he goes to look, Condor and I drop the hook in haste, throwing the chain over the windlass-drum, paying out two shackles. . . . What if the anchor

does not hold? Our nose swings to windward, the gale weighs less on our rigging, then the cable gradually tautens until we stay in a fixed position.

We breathe a bit more freely now; the Colonel comes forward and suggests having a second anchor out. Astern within ten feet of our dinghy, the water is hissing against the end of a queerly shaped pier. Dooley, having only just realised how narrow an escape we have had, says with a stammer to the Colonel: "No use for a second anchor Sir. . . ." Meanwhile I coil a hawser. Our captain must be angry with me for taking charge at the last second; I will try to make myself unobtrusive for a while. . . . But Dooley looks so lost and I am so tired and overpowered with fifteen hours of wind gone through me, that all I want to do now is to sleep soundly. The gale is veering a bit to the south-west, which is a good thing, as by letting a third shackle out we can get moored across with a cable on the pier.

So we did. But Dooley insisted nevertheless on taking watches with Condor, while I turned in, having rather enjoyed my evening after all.

The next morning looked innocent as a smiling child, with a flat sea shining under a pale sky. As usual I was woken up by Revell's flat feet walking stiffly on top of my cabin to fetch the milk out of the meat-safe for the early morning teas. A whiff of coal-smoke meant that the stove was burning all right. I dressed to the accompaniment of sucking noises made by the pump worked by the boy. The Colonel had shouted "Hay! Hay! . . ." through the passage, to get his shaving water. . . . Another day had begun.

Before scrubbing the decks we had to clear up the muddle. Aloft a backstay was caught in a brail and the jib boltrope torn. The dinghies were half full of water, the new sail of my *Jasper* soaked, with its cover chafed.

We glided down Southampton River once more; it was only off Calshot that I went below to my breakfast of eggs and bacon. Mr. Furber was telling me about his eight sons

and what one of them was doing in Mexico, when a series of crashing hollow bangs interrupted us. . . .

After a tour on deck I could resume my breakfast and reassure Mrs. Furber: the Bramble buoy had "jumped at us," the leeboard had jammed and was not down, because Dooley had missed stays and could not bring the *Volunteer* about. To gather steerage-way he had ordered the engine to be started. . . . "Well, well, I never! . . ." as Puck used to say. What sailing was this! . . .

The Colonel wanted to lunch at Cowes, and between himself and Dooley, trying to help each other with the helm, they managed to bump four times into the red buoy bang in front of the Royal Yacht Squadron, of all places in the world. Shame within a thousand shames. . . . But they didn't seem embarrassed by the mess they made of their sailing; Furber was the only one to understand my reactions. We managed to let go the anchor in a place riddled with currents, we dragged away and had to perform at the windlass . . . while all the time there were buoys quite handy, off Lallow shipyard. I have forgotten to say that we picked up an extra deck-hand at Southampton, a silent man called Hookey (or was he reduced to silence by our performances?) because the Colonel realised during the night how short-handed we were when a serious pull was needed.

Next day, without any more mishap, we reached Newhaven under our squaresail. At sea we had seen a surprising box-like contraption behind five tugs: it proved to be what was the biggest floating dock, on its way to Australia.

I like ugly and narrow Newhaven harbour for the familiarity it creates among the yachts tied in three or four rows at each berth, the biggest ones against the piles, the smallest three-tonners and Quay Punts on the outside. . . . From your neighbour you hear valuable details about his passages, about experiences with rigging, ballast, engine. . . . He will always be able to tell you something you did not know. From him you hear the hoped-for words:

". . . Care to come below?" You are admitted to the intimacy of a cabin, in which you learn much about the owners' idiosyncrasies, what he reads, what he smokes, what he wears, what he drinks. . . . Sometimes he will tell you his last great adventure. But always, if you draw him on, he will tell you how gallantly 'she' behaved, and that when things went wrong, it was his mistake because he had not understood her properly. "Of all the living creatures upon land and sea, it is ships alone that cannot be taken in by barren pretences, that will not put up with bad art from their masters," said Conrad. "Ships are all right; it is the men in 'em. . . ."

In short, when stormbound in harbour, there is no better way of spending your time than spinning yarns with friendly neighbours, sharing plans about future cruises . . . or future boats. Arguments are endless: one yachtsman believes in a modern elliptic stern with good overhang so that overtaking seas will know where to lift her. . . . Another says: "Never! Give me the old-fashioned long-keeled hull, with a straight stem so that you can lie to easily, the boat knowing on what to rest. . . !"

There, in harbour, we met a lovely *Charmian* with tanned sails, *Vivacious*, *Gardenia* a clever boat crammed with useful gadgets, *Pilot* whose curly-headed child with candid eyes fished for eels,—the father explaining that the best bait is made of soft crab left for three days in a tin and then well rubbed with ordinary garden worms. . . .

In Newhaven I met Halliday for the first time, all wet from sea-spray, at the helm of the small *Clotilde*. He described to me the Norwegian fjords as well as the South Sea Islands which every year were more invaded by the Chinese. He was a naval architect full of life and good advice, who had sailed before the mast in many seas. There also I met—for the first and last time—a well set-up boy of nineteen studying at Newhaven to become a marine engineer. One night he dined with me on board; next day we rowed in the dinghy to bathe on the shingle beach at Seaford. And

later, from the height overlooking the long breakwater, sitting in the grass, we looked at the sunset in silence. . . . We looked at the same horizon, the same wind throwing our hair away from our foreheads.

CHAPTER VIII

Over to France as Deck-Hand

Though we had got under way at half past four in the morning, by lunch time we were only off Beachy Head. So Condor started his detestable 'turnspit' in order to bring the barge beyond the tramps' highway before nightfall. The harpoon-log was sunk overboard. With the parallel rule the Colonel had read our course for Dieppe: south 19 east. That means that during the four hours of a watch, the only thing you will see clearly is the compass card moving gently in the twilight of the binnacle with a life of its own; and your duty is to bring the degree '19' as often as possible near the motionless lubber's point.

What a splendid night! Once the mailboat had overtaken us, and the boss had yawned noisily, saying he wanted to play shut-eye for a while . . . there was no more sense of time. Nothing but a friendly, regular smashing of seas by the bow. . . . Nothing but an all-pervading peace, the deep peace in which you forget what you are, you can't think any more, you are just lost in the whole with a rich feeling that some part of you is getting nourishment out of the silence. You feel unknown gigantic forces flowing near you in which your minute self is happily drowned.

To port I have instinctively counted seven white erratic lights; they must be fishing-smacks. Now the Colonel clears his throat in his cabin and soon appears on deck. I answer his question about who is on watch. "Good God," he says, "you smoke a pipe? What boy taught you that?" He gives me a good refill from his aromatic silken pouch. At two in the morning Condor appears; we leave the deck to him and turn in. In case I may be wanted, I sleep on the saloon

settee, on the leeside, while the oilskins swish slowly under the companion staircase.

Two hours later I wake up feeling uneasy. Without a tell-tale compass I know that our course has been altered; those rattling noises mean either a gybe or a going about. I jump on deck, and find we are heading south-west. Dooley says he wants to avoid running into a wreck, which I could swear is only a net-pole with a few floating tins. We have lost our speed, we roll, and it is difficult to stand on the deck slippery with dew. Somewhere towards Belgium the blackness of the sky is slowly turning to grey.

"What is your idea of steering South-West instead of South by East?"

"I am making for that steam-trawler: they will give us our position. We ought to have seen Dieppe's light long ago. . . ."

"But you can't overtake this trawler, he is moving. . . . We are all right, Dooley, stick to our course, we will soon see something. There is no real fog, and this haze will lift with the dawn. Well, we have not yet covered our mileage! Look at the log, and reckon with our zigzags. . . . I think I will stay up, Dooley, I want to see the sunrise; you can turn in."

During this last episode I have managed to keep calm. Perhaps next time I shall even be able to laugh! I must grow wiser; I am tired of filling my log-book with nothing but grumbles. Nagging at them all the time as I do will only make me bitter and sarcastic. After all is it so serious what we are doing? Supposing we run into a steamer and make a 'hole in the water'—as we say in French for sinking, we will not be drowned, there will be spars to catch hold of. Also I must remember this: it is because of the poor seamanship on board the *Volunteer* that I have become somebody important. Had I sailed with the perfect English yacht I dreamt of, and learnt how things are done, I should have remained a nonentity—and not become what I now imagine myself to be. . . .

After all, the barge does not belong to me: could I not be more careless about her? This is not *real* sailing, I am only fooling about, and I have taken the job to fill in time. When I am working on board Miette's boat it will be right to feel touchy about manœuvres. No happy-go-lucky style then, as it will be our life's job to be pleased with our sailing. Well, I shall probably never see the Colonel and his barge again: both of them are temporary, they don't count.

Presumption of youth! I laugh now when I remember the kind of contempt I had for the *Volunteer*. My job which I called just "something in between" was one of the best approaches to real life I have ever had. This love for the way of a hull in the deep, dark fluid mass . . . this experience of being wedded to wind and water which creates the exhilarating feeling that you have become more than just yourself. . . . Little did I guess then that the barge would be my sheet anchor during years full of indecision and selfishness.

But also how could I know about what matters? How did I dare decide about what 'counts'? How could I judge the value of what I was doing? According to some vague visions, my future was to be a succession of first-class actions shining with a sincere intensity which would give them their value. From where, I wonder now, did I get this arrogant hope that my deeds would be of such a high standard? Why did I care for the best only? Perhaps because my friends were among the good climbers of the Alps or the good sailors of the ocean, and I wanted to be worthy of their esteem? Was I unconsciously trying to imitate some heroes discovered in books? Or was I simply dreaming about a daring life as opposed to the dull town routine?

It was probably the reaction of the individual against the encroaching mass organisation of modern life, in which everybody does the same thing at the same time. Was I foolish to rebel against this town life which I felt was wrong? Only during the school vacation, in summer when I sailed and in winter when I ski-ed, did I live fully, devoting my

time to my world. Why not turn all my life into golden holidays? Or if it proved impossible, act so as to kindle this feeling of being deeply alive.

As long as my father provided for me it was easy to speak like that. But I was finding it a moral necessity to become self-supporting; and I had to solve the problem of 'how to make money'. Was there a way to avoid the daily office work dismissing you in the evening when the sun is already dying? Parties at night, a cinema or concert now and then, such a life had charm, but it was not my life; only hurriedly on Sundays would I get away from the mechanised atmosphere, searching for joy in the mountains.

Had I been qualified to get a thrilling and well-paid job in town, had I found it possible to love and marry a rich man, life might not have been bad. . . . It would have meant a sailing boat, a car to reach the mountain quickly, and lovely clothes in which to look smart. . . . But none of these alternatives could make me forget the fact: most men live in a world which means nothing to them except that they must get their pay out of it. A world of which nobody has apparently got control, though man has mastered all its elements. A world of machine production in which man does not count, in which he is not asked if he likes to push, to pull, to sell, to smile . . . a world not worth living for because it destroys the personality of everyone instead of helping it to bloom.

Even supposing that social morality in my country was not too dreadfully inhuman, I had understood enough of what Paris and London meant. If they were what they pretended to be, capitals at the prow of our time and civilisation, then the world was rotten, and I would have as little as possible to do with them. . . . Youth's judgments are always sweeping.

Why should I harness myself to this whirlpool of injustice which led nowhere near a deeper reality? I was beginning to feel a sense of duty but only towards myself. It said: " . . . keep true to yourself, avoid any way of living that

might blunt your acute desire to understand. . . . Remain free until you know what you stand for and what your contribution to the world ought to be."

To live according to such a programme implied continual suffering. It made me feel so lonely. Now and again the ordeal created such pain that I thought it was too much for me. "All man's miseries derive from his not being able to sit quiet in a room alone," said Pascal. Well, supposing I could not? Was I not mad to complicate things like that? My life would be useless if I only took jobs to 'fill in time': a rolling stone gathers no moss. Was I sure I did not want to be a success as people mean it generally? Had I not better marry like others and get busy with my own house? Would not my timidly voiced longings vanish as soon as love gave meaning to my life? But whenever I believed that I had fallen in love, I soon made the painful discovery that I was only in love with my idea of love.

That is why, next to my assurance, coupled with a desire to attain high standards, I felt with awe a distrust of myself. . . . I heard in me a fear which said: "Don't make a mess of your life, of the qualities you received at birth. . . . See that when you die you aren't ashamed of yourself."

This has taken me a long way from the Channel. . . . I have not yet exhausted the joy of sailing to France, towards a landfall in a new country. Ahead of us the comforting eye of the lighthouse will soon be looking at me and once I have studied the chart I shall alter the course for the harbour entrance.

Revell, in his long white apron, comes on deck to fetch the milk, so I send Hookey to get me a cup of tea. The breeze is steady from the east. The grey-green waves, as they move like crinkled taffetas, are a shade darker than the hazy sky. The frozen sun, cherry-red on the horizon, soon turns the barge's tanned sails into a mass of heaving canvas soaked in fresh blood; dark beads of dew run down, nearly parallel to the seams. Dawn sends a thrill through

everything and a quiet energy is hidden in the wind's whisper.

I enjoy myself particularly at this moment, because three years ago, on the Lake, the grown-ups forbade me to do what I am doing now: sail with men on a barge. . . . At home there were many *barques de Meillerie* which brought the freestone of Savoy to Geneva. They had two huge lateen sails. When the *bise noire* was blowing for three, six, or nine days, and the entrance of Geneva harbour was too dangerous for them—they had no engine—they came for shelter in the Creux; and they tied their hawsers as thick as my wrist round the willow, the acacia and the chestnut tree growing on the shore in front of our house. During the night I could hear their bare yards grating against the masts. They were between sixty and ninety feet long, built of oak, manned by crews of four and a boy. I thought they looked like real men, with their kerchiefs round their necks, and their caps over one ear. The height of bliss would have been to sail with them, were it only the short distance to Geneva. That would be the real thing: to take part in a sail which was not a pastime but a bread-making concern.

So once, while they hoisted the sails along their trackways, I yielded to the call of the creaking wooden blocks. I slipped out of my window at four a.m., took Pucci my boy cousin with me—for safety's sake, in case there were such things as 'bad men'—and silently we glided away towards the lilliputian steeple of the Geneva cathedral. I had forgotten all about my school where I had to be at eight o'clock. It was a unique morning.

My eyes were suddenly very sensitive. The ripples breaking against our hull were like lambs jumping with joy. The new sun played on our russet-coloured sails, creating delicate deep-blue and adorable shadows such as I had never seen before. . . . Far away in the east, the livid Mont Blanc presided. The hills of Cologny and Pregny came out of their misty slumber on each side of the lake, and met in the middle of the landscape where Geneva slept at the foot of

the massive Salève. Radiant from the brightness of the water and displaying wide, harmonious proportions, the peaceful country smiled, every region of it conscious of being part of a perfect whole.

To-day in the Channel my joy is similar though perhaps less intense. The coming dawn weakens the flashing brilliance of the lighthouse; its eye appears at the water-level, twinkling every fourth second, moving from one place to another according to the queer tricks 'fixed lights' seem to indulge in. Our dead-reckoning is not bad; the tides have cancelled each other.

On top of the town above the hill, Notre-Dame de Neuville, the votive church, is clearly outlined, watching over every wave and boat on the wide sea. Chug, chug, puff, puff . . . among a collection of fishing smacks, we pass between the Dieppe jetties. Too late for the dock, we stay in the tidal harbour. It means looking after our lines, as our barge slowly goes down along a greasy wall smelling of sea-weed, trickling drains, wet mud and dead fish. It is not easy to climb the steps of the ladder wedged into the wall. Tiny grey crabs, household refuse, black rims of heavy oil, belong to this low world under the level of the quay. What fun to look at the 'Café du Phare', a noisy French pub where coffee poured into glasses is served with a ration of *eau-de-vie;* there, two fishermen in blue drill come out, wiping their moustaches, one of them saying with disgust: "Ah ben merde alors . . . !" This makes England seem suddenly a long way behind.

Within a few yards of our topmast, a passenger train stands motionless: it will be in Paris soon, disgorging its load in the feverish hustle of the capital.

But there is no time to dawdle: my services as interpreter are needed with the customs and the harbour-master; we want to enter the Bassin Berigny at high tide. I am supposed to look after the catering too, though I am sure Revell has done it many times before, when he was by himself.

The Colonel wants to be rowed round to see which yachts

are in. Tired, because I have been much on deck last night, I decide to go to sleep early; also I am longing to read some letters I have found here at the Poste Restante, and this time maybe I shall know which boat Miette has chosen for our cruise to Greece. . . . But no, the Colonel wants me to 'put something on' so that I can accompany him to the Casino. It would hurt him if I were to say no, and going alone would be no fun for him. But the rust and the black mud from our cables does not come off my hands, my nails are broken . . . and I shall feel awful among smart and made-up women. The Colonel orders a cab and practises his French on the cabman; with me he is most gallant, ordering the claret I like, giving me a few chips to play with at *boule*. . . . But it is only my bunk I want; so I become dumb until he gets tired of doing all the talking. How could I make him understand that he is a tyrant, even when he thinks he is most chivalrous? Constantly he 'goes for me', accusing me of doing nothing when he has not seen me for ten minutes. At the same time, having a heart of gold he understands quickly other people's difficulties. How queer to think that we have in us such different or even contradictory personalities. . . . Probably I am also hateful sometimes to those who like me. Anyhow, if you want to be a good boss, you must be able to realise when your people are 'fed up', and if for a good reason.

Next day at high-tide we enter the dock and steer the barge on top of the grid-iron. There she sits easily like a hen on her large belly; but last year a Dutch herring-boat with a keel, sliding on the grid-iron, struck the wall and killed two men on the spot. It is slippery, no doubt, and when we walk about in our rubber boots while scraping the barge's sides free of barnacles, we have to be as careful as on a polished marble floor. Across the dock a cargo-boat is unloading 14,000 boxes with two bunches of bananas per box. She comes from the Canary Isles and will go back there loaded with straw. Her mate says I can go with them if I like. . . .

The sunset creates beauty in Dieppe harbour. The soft light, like a sauce made by a master-cook, smoothly blends the elements building the landscape. Across the dock the 'quartier du Pollet' where the fishermen live has a distinction of its own. But the secret of this beauty lies in the long, high walls rising out of the dark water . . . well-built stone walls facing West so that the rays can play on them, turning them into shades of gold, ochre and pink. Bathed in the same colours are the old houses clustered on top of these battlements. . . . The eye finds nothing that is out of place, and there lingers peacefully that special harmony created by unity.

In the evening, during dinner, our owner tries to shock Mrs. Furber by explaining that his tailor always sews the four small buttons on top of his sleeve in order to remind him not to wipe his nose on his arm. . . . He is well pleased with his story, and while he thinks of another, he smoothes his pale, long moustaches. He can be interesting when he wants to, because he is well read in English history. Also he knows much about big game shooting. When he was young and good-looking with not so much fat on him—at this moment of the telling he would slap his stomach—he was like a king in Africa, surveying Lake Rudolph and South Somaliland. It was in the eighteen-nineties. Later he trekked to the Shibeli River with his 'missus' and there she killed a leopard, which I was going to see later, stuffed under a glass case at Pythouse.

One of the Colonel's peculiarities was to send many telegrams asking friends to come on board for a few days. Therefore when arriving in a harbour we never knew if perhaps too many people might not turn up instead of their reply-paid wires!

CHAPTER IX

Farewell "Volunteer"

Our owner decided that his pigs and cows needed him at home, so we accompanied him one night to the Newhaven boat; and we sailed quietly next day to Le Havre, according to his instructions.

In spite of a tiring swell making us climb up and down hills of shiny water, it was a nice day. I had a good rest, enjoying a sun-bath on deck while studying the Sailing Directions about the mouth of the Seine and the approaches to Trouville.

Landmarks and buoys behaved nicely and everything went well until we found ourselves between the breakwaters of Le Havre. It is always a critical moment when one has to decide quickly where to anchor. As a rule the corner of the harbour one has in mind is occupied, so one noses around aimlessly, getting in everybody's way until more or less forced by circumstances to do something. Well . . . we came a bit too near the pilots' corner, tightly packed with their sailing cutters; we had to put the *Volunteer* full astern and mess about until her bow pointed in another direction. By that time two fishing smacks had come near, both of them eager to help, each of them shouting contradictory advice. We ended by spending the night to the leeward of a few racing 'Six metres' near the tugs' quay. One of the 'Sixes' was *Aile IV*, belonging to Virginie Hériot, and one of the sailors gave me her news. Virginie was then the undisputed queen of French sailing—alas she is no more—living all the year round on her elegant schooner *Ailée*, and I had sailed with her twice in the Mediterranean. Had fate made me rich, I would probably have lived like her—unless

I had become a yacht builder. Once upon a time she had thought of taking me on board as companion. But she had given up the idea after finding out that I could not 'keep my distance' with the crew, and that I preferred the company of fishermen to the conversation of her guests. She had been kind to Miette and me, though we lived ill-clad and bare-foot on board our small *Perlette*. She had introduced us to Alain Gerbault at Nice, in 1923, as we were sitting on the quay studying the details of the newly-arrived *Firecrest*, old-fashioned and seaworthy cutter which we had just decided to kidnap as soon as possible.

In Le Havre we learnt that *Ailée* was refitting in the canal de Tancarville. So two days later when the Colonel was with us once more I offered to show him a real yacht. We drove in a 'fly' along many docks. As soon as we arrived the mate told us that Virginie would be back in a week, just before sailing for Norway. *Ailée*, except for the lovely lines of her deck, did not look smart, as she was undergoing a complete overhaul. The mate recognised me and he called our Thames barge a *galiote hollandaise* which sounded grand!

In spite of the variety of ships always on show there, Le Havre is a sad town, grey, dirty, old. Between the station and the harbour plied a ridiculous tramcar in which travellers and their luggage have to find place when on their way to Southampton. We went ashore for one or two meals, invited by the Furbers. On Tortoni's terrace we ordered *Chateaubriand pommes frites* while looking at the masts in the Bassin du Commerce. I was glad to leave the neighbourhood of the big liners and hooting tugs, when the *Volunteer* sailed for Trouville.

We were in high spirits because the pale blue elements made us believe it was already summer. We hardly had time to say how easy it would be to sail up the river to Paris as far as the pont de la Concorde, before the Trouville pilot boat came in sight, flying its red and white flag. We did not need him; it was high tide—three black balls hoisted on the jetty—and we entered the tidal harbour, passing near

the white building of the casino, and from there sailed straight into the small dock.

At this moment began the kind of typical entertainment provided by the *Volunteer*. From the shore the harbour-master took command so as to bring us where he thought fit. As I was the only one to understand his orders and as quick obedience is the secret of success in such cases, I took the helm. Unhappily Dooley had other manœuvres in mind; instead of listening to what I was translating, he dropped the hook. The Colonel, who had guessed what was wanted, got furious, cursed Dooley so heartily that Mrs. Furber had to vanish modestly down the companion, and, at last sent me to "Up anchor!" At the windlass my ears had to listen to tons of abuse addressed to the poor Colonel in particular and after-decks in general! By the time we were alongside, the usual crowd of loafers had assembled on the quay, commenting on our merry-go-round evolutions.

To recover from this shameful exhibition the best thing was to drink vermouth on the terrace of the nearest café. How nice it is that on the South coast of the Channel one lives so much out of doors! People don't hesitate to speak to each other across the street, privacy is no more a necessity, and doors as well as windows are often left wide open. Neither a railing nor a half-yard of ditch-garden seems needed between walls and footpaths: from the houses' threshold one can see the whole length of the street. Frank curiosity appears to be the explanation of the continental attitude towards everything. That is why a Parisian, a Viennese, or a Russian crowd is so much more alive than a London mass of decent human beings, each of which is blind, dumb, and uninterested in his neighbours.

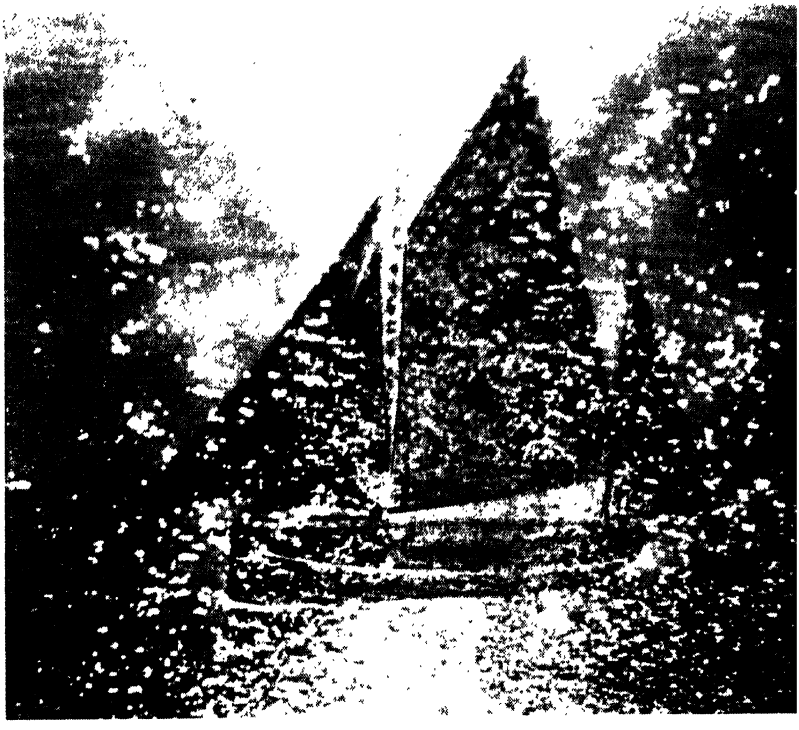
The Colonel, seized by a fit of feverish activity, wanted to push out to sea early next morning; he was quite astonished to discover that neither fuel nor water had been bought. We were short of coal too, so I had to accompany him while he set off quickly to find some. We soon spied what looked a likely place, but in spite of his jokes and courtesies the

Colonel was sharply ticked off: it was Sunday and French people are not so keen as all that to make money, we learnt. So we decided to honour the beach with our presence in the afternoon.

By then I knew that in the South of France Miette had bought, for very little money, the fifty-years'-old *Bonita*, a ten-ton yawl. And I knew that I would be needed as soon as *Bonita's* repairs were finished in the shipyard at Marseilles. I was therefore waiting for a wire. One day I discovered with a shock that it was no use asking at the poste restante if they had anything for 'Maillart' because they have a habit in harbours of sorting the mail under the name of the 'yaks' (they mean 'yachts' of course). So whatever the temperature I had to put on my sweater with the red lettering every time I went to the post-office to collect our letters. If I didn't dress up I was met by a suspicious remark: "Vous? Vous êtes du 'yak' *Volontaire?*"

We left Trouville by the afternoon tide. Between the jetties the *Volunteer* began to dance in a powerful swell; we towed four helpless fishing smacks well off the shore. We had to seize the dinghies carefully in their davits and lash the staysail in the lee shrouds. Happily the mainsail was drawing nicely. When I turned up on deck at midnight after my spell below, there was a flat calm. The shiny sea was full of stars dancing towards their twins in the sky. I soon felt sleepy; with such weather there is nothing to do but try to stop jerking noises. The world seems to be in a state of complete suspense. Just before I went to sleep again the sun appeared distorted like a Chinese lantern.

When I woke up at midday I felt I needed another six hours' sleep. In fact I was in that drowsy state which comes before sea-sickness takes complete hold of you. Impossible to decide in such a moment if it might be good for you to eat something or not! After my trick at the wheel I went to lie down in the saloon . . . and I do not remember much about our passage to Newhaven. Of course we had long discussions in the night about what the tides had done to



THE
DREAMSHIP

THE CAPTAIN AND
THE MATE

THE CAPTAIN WASHING UP
WITH MARIE

THE
FOUR OF US

us, and if it were possible for us to have been carried away as far as Dungeness. Or could it be Beachy Head flashing at us?

In the early morning when the haze lifted sufficiently we recognised Hastings: Dooley had been right! So the same afternoon we landed our guests at Newhaven. And that time kind Mrs. Furber kissed me good-bye. . . .

The telegram I had been waiting for so anxiously was brought on board; I did my packing the same evening. Next day with great feeling I said good-bye to everything and everybody on board—I would have liked to kiss dear old Dooley my shipmate, and dear old Colonel my boss, but I was too shy. . . . And at last, from the steamer's deck I waved good-bye to Beachy Head, an old friend by now. . . . Life was grand. There was no problem for the present: I was a sailor, going from one harbour to another, deck hand on the *Volunteer*, mate on the *Bonita*.

PART II

CHAPTER X

Our Decision Confirmed

"A wind's in the heart of me, a fire's in my heels,
I'm tired of brick and stone and rumbling wagon-wheels;
I hunger for the sea's edge, the limits of the land,
Where the wild old Atlantic is shouting on the sand."

—Masefield.

One day spent in Paris to see some people about a job for next winter, one day in Geneva to fill a sailbag with summer clothes, and then it was Marseilles, once more living on board in the Vieux-Port.

The same old salts we had met when *Perlette* was there were still joking on the quay; but we worked like slaves sixteen hours a day, anxious to leave as soon as possible since we did not want to waste part of the good season in harbour. On *Bonita*, as on board *Perlette* our previous cutter, we had no engine; therefore not a day was to be lost if we were to reach Greece before September. Pa-tchoum, our Master of Arts, had to dig in Crete for the Ecole Française d'Athènes, and Yvonne, Miette's sister and our fourth hand, had to be back in Geneva by the end of September too. She had no special qualifications as a sailor—she was the eldest, belonging to the grown-ups, and known to have sailed on the Lake with a parasol!—but Miette thought as a heavy-weight she would be useful for pulling down the mainsail during those Mediterranean squalls that burst like lightning. Pa-tchoum would be more helpful (though she pretended to be a typical landlubber, calling everything a rope) because Miette had trained her during a long cruise among the Greek islands in *Perlette*.

Our fitting-out was nearly completed. Miette the captain and owner fiercely threw back assailing reporters of the *Petit Marseillais*, while the mate battled with suppliers' bills; Yvonne sewed flea-bags and cushions, and Pa-tchoum secured pots and pans in the fo'c'sle . . . until we sailed for Corsica.

It was our first passage out of sight of land; the second took place between Sardinia and Palermo; the third between Sicily and Greece. But I am not going to describe *Bonita's* cruise. There are things you cannot express. Sometimes even the truest and best chosen words betray life. First of all because, in themselves, the words of a sentence stand for a definite form of expression, shaping certain moods forever, into an immobility which is deathlike. Whereas moods and deeds can have varied meanings according to the angle from which you study them, like half-tones or sounds that no words can capture, but only eyes or ears which deal with living vibrations. I do not want to put our actions into the fixed mould of sentences. I want them to go on living in me, one day full of the brilliance of youth, another heavy with the seeds of our future, a third time rich with a challenge to tottering Europe, or proof of a will-power growing through years. . . .

I am not completely detached from that part of my past, nor capable of looking at it coldly; it still vibrates in me. It meant so much to us. Unlike a holiday trip which is an end in itself, it was the overture to a full and pure life. For us, hardly twenty years of age, eager to see the world by our own means, what intense living it was! Do you realise the importance everything has when you are responsible for everything? . . . And the feeling of freedom you experience, tacking wherever you like, calling at this harbour or in that creek . . . waiting for better weather or taking the risk of going under weigh—every day, sometimes every hour bringing a choice?

We tested through experience what we had discussed at length with Gerbault about the ease and the comfort of a

cruise in a small boat, about the physical fatigue or the anxiety which might dishearten us. . . .

The cruise was a success, in spite of too heavy a breeze in the South Adriatic which broke our gaff. But in Sicily we learnt the sad news of our captain's father's death: Yvonne went back to Geneva and sent us the young brother of the family, the unruly Ben, to complete the port watch.

Our decision was confirmed: we would follow the tracks of Slocum, Nutting, Knight . . . we would leave *Bonita* to be sold in Greece. Miette would buy our dream-ship. We would sail to New York, and then across Panama to the South Seas, where we would make our lives. According to our old principle we would try not to speak about it before it was done.

With such a plan so nearly ripe, the humdrum life around us did not matter during the next winter. The misery in restless Germany, the hopelessness of Austria, the despotic measures enforced in Italy, the million poor Greek refugees sent out of Turkey (we had seen a number of them living in dug-outs), the crashing of the franc in a country which had won the war, the General Strike in England, the hundreds of thousands of hooligans in Russia, the lack of real decency in every branch of human activity—such depressing realities echoed from the Genevese walls of the League of Nations. I did not listen; I was too much drawn by the South Seas. Though we never expressed it to each other in words, none of us felt we had much in common with our tired world. We had seen nothing worth living for, we were slowly detaching ourselves from our surroundings, screwing up our courage for a life without compromise, far away. If a life at sea proved to be too difficult, there were still the open spaces of Canada waiting for us. . . . My great friend Bob had just left Geneva to begin a silver fox ranch in British Columbia. . . .

We needed a sound seaworthy boat that would not heel nor roll too much. If Miette could not find her in France, I would search in harbours round the North Sea. We got

more daring every day. We convinced Miette, who did not like the idea, that the uniqueness of our scheme made it a stunt which would bring us enough money in New York to pay for one year's expenses, as well as for the copper sheathing the boat would need to resist the Teredo worms of the Pacific waters. By revealing our plan, Pa-tchoum got many months' food free from Parisian firms, on the strength of our past cruises. Meanwhile I explored the queer world of the cinema industry, learnt to handle a movie camera, called on the head of the Gevaert Co. at Antwerp, received a thousand metres of negative film standard size, signed a contract with a company which lent me a camera, and decided to engage a professional for a week, so that we should have good close-ups of the life aboard.

All went so well that even an expensive chronometer was lent to us by a Swiss firm; a valuable Gaumont photo-camera was also gratefully received. Then I bought a second-hand typewriter in order to deal with our business letters, and later on with our articles.

These preparations forced us to speak about our design. It annoyed us. We had a kind of superstition that so far everything had succeeded because envious gods had never heard about our cruises before they began. Now for the first time we behaved differently.

At last Miette found, in Brittany, the perfect ship for our voyage, a pilot-boat, sister-ship of the well-known cruising cutter *Jolie-Brise*, in which she was putting nearly all her money. At the same time we heard that Yvonne, our ship-mate from the *Bonita*, was financing a Studio of Dramatic Art in Geneva, and her brother Ben had bought a shipyard on the Lake. So we had to look for a fourth girl whom we would have to train.

CHAPTER XI

Brittany

In March I left Geneva and her mountains for Brittany and the seaside: once more I would miss the birth of the buds and the earth's green metamorphosis. In a lonely part of the world, up a tidal creek in a flat country, I lived for many weeks, alone, on board.

Our pilot-boat was within a few yards of a tunny-fish canning factory; its noise and smell seemed unbearable until one got accustomed to them—a heavy smell of warm oil impregnated everything. The only other house in sight stood near some trees, at the extremity of our small peninsula: the pub where Georges Terriou fed me on fish soup or *cotriade*. Skippers and crews of the *thonniers*—the local smacks—went there too, during the fitting-out season. Their patois was impossible to understand; but when they were not too drunk they would spin amazing yarns for my benefit, glorifying the speed of their yawl-rigged 'dundees', or the deeds of their crews against pirates on the Mauretanian coast, where they went to get lobsters. They brought back their catches in large fish-wells which filled the whole width of their ships. How I loved their garrulous speech, their high spirits! These Bretons can beat hollow the world-renowned loquacity of the Marseillais. . . . For one thing, they spend most of the winter idling on their stony isle of Groix, devastated by the winds, where nothing but potatoes grow; so that when they return to the mainland they have much lost time to make up. Small, with bow-legs most of them, they were a sight, in their patched, sea-stained drab, dragging wooden clogs which showed the leather sewn on their socks, teasing each other with sparkling eyes, twisting

up their moustaches, behaving like demi-gods with the natural pride of those who are 'master after God' on deck. . . . But when their voices became raucous and when they sang coarse ballads to make me blush, it was time for me to leave.

Georges et Madeleine was the name of our boat, so we decided to rename her *Atalante*. She was lovely, built for the deep seas, with her good beam, straight stem and counter stern, the elegant flush-deck ending with a nice sheer towards the bowsprit. Her cutter rig, with its very long boom, was too heavy for a crew of girls, so we altered her into a yawl. This was done at the local shipyard because we wanted the kind of rigging the tunny boats have and especially their rolling reefing-gear. (*Atalante* was 52½ feet over all, 15 foot beam, 8 foot draught and 43 ton T.M.)

Once more we decided to avoid worries by having no engine. We brought *Atalante* on the hard to inspect her hull. At low-tide, naked and in full view, she was a beautiful creation. Like an athlete, she was strong but smooth, muscular but smart, round and slim at the same time. She reminded me of the bodies of the tunnies unloaded every day on the wharf. The long-finned white tunny, or *germon*, is said to be the gamest fish there is, powerful, fast and clever; when caught on a line he dives deep, darts under your keel and stays there, where the chafe and the angle of the line are such that he defeats you for a long time. Blue and green on the back, he is a striking fish with dangerous teeth and a pale belly; the body narrows to nearly nothing before spreading into a sharp and wide swallow-tail caudal fin which provides a useful hold for fishermen to carry him ashore.

" . . . *Atalante's* stern post has a soft place which will have to be chipped off and replaced; her rudder needs a new main-piece and new bronze-straps. She will also be caulked in all her lower part. On deck a new main-sheet horse will have to pass over the rudder at the only place where bolts

can come through girders. As for the top of the companion, it will have to be rebuilt as well as the sky-light coaming," so said Miette, when we were discussing every detail before her departure, so that I should not have big responsibilities to take on alone. Yes, Miette was leaving me, probably for six weeks, joining a tunny-boat of the Bureau des Pêcheries which was off to find out if the white tunnies really went in winter to Madeira; as maybe it would be possible to catch them with nets during that season. With a tear in my eye I saw Miette disappear over the sea, on board the sixty-tonner *Hébé*. She was bound to get some practice at handling her sextant, and she would also gain experience of bad weather in the Atlantic.

I was left to a life I love but in conditions I did not like. It was a continual struggle to keep the workmen at their job. If I had been to town, on my return I would find the carpenter away, called by the shipyard's boss to finish a more urgent job than ours; or else, feeling thirsty, simply gone to fetch a litre of cider. "What? You don't expect a hard-working man not to get dry?" As for handsome ogling Yves, with his cap low over one eye, who could handle a sharp chisel with such precision, his week never began before Tuesday, as he needed the whole of Monday to recover from Sunday. . . . He had a way with girls, they said; and I agreed, because though I was often really angry with him, he could always make me laugh. Then there was Le Gonidec, who had nearly finished our pretty dinghy designed by Miette, came on deck; but he was whisked away in his turn and I only got him back a week later. The water tanks I had ordered were three centimetres larger than my measurements and could not be taken down the companion-way! Most of the work had to be done inside the boat. The ballast was taken out so that the bottom could be neatly cemented; the pig-irons were rusty and full of dirt from the bilge water. So I decided to have them hammered and treated with red lead. The idiot who was helping me did not come back the second day, he had landed

himself in jail. As for the workman dealing with my cupboards, he had slipped and hurt himself. . . .

I went through hours of despair, thinking that *Atalante* would never be ready for Miette's return. The owner of the shipyard at last came to my help, and for one or two days the right men worked for me. "It is always like that during the Spring," said the skipper of the *Lusitania* to me. "That's why I don't go to the shipyard, but I get the carpenter to work for me after hours. . . ."

On the quay there were a hundred and eighty pig-irons to be handled, each weighing 50 lbs. as they are a most useful ballast I was afraid some of them would get pinched during the night, so I worked as fast as I could. My zeal provoked many remarks among the passing Sunday strollers. "That's the way. . . . Neat job! She is not afraid to work, the lady. Sure, you would not see one of ours doing that. . . ." For the half-hour following such comments I would feel quite good. But then I would hear somebody mumbling: "Completely needless . . .", and my joy would vanish suddenly. Yes, the shipyard owner had told me it was not necessary to handle the pig-irons when the hold was cemented. But I stuck to my decision, remembering how disgusting rusty bilge-water can be when it comes over the settees in a serious heel-over.

Some people did not agree with our doings. Fontaine, a workman, tired of my rebukes, used to speak out frankly: "Oh you, you know everything better, what? You want the best but you want it for nothing. If you bought this nice pilot-boat, you can't be as poor as all that. . . ."

As for the passers-by, they had been gossiping. They could not make out what the *Atalante* was. She must be a 'yak' with those 'dames' handling her. . . . But one of those dames was working hard in filthy overalls and the 'yak' was fitted out with the two fishing booms peculiar to tunny boats. The good people were astonished, they thought it was impossible to go a-fishing without a master! It happened that a few skippers got angry with us. Their

women had told them that they were nothing but lazy-bones and that their so-called hard work was only *une occupation de demoiselles. . . .*

Books meant much to me during that period. Not only stories of cruises pointing out the best line to sail across the Atlantic from East to West, or books about the South Seas, like Frank Bullen's and Hermann Melville's, but also technical advice concerning ship-building and interior arrangements. We were going to live for a long time in this hull, things had to be practical. Aft was the sail-locker with spare running rigging, lines and fenders, folding sea-anchor, suit-cases, and our out-board motor for the dinghy. Coming down the companion-way to starboard a spare bunk was ready for the second 'man' of the watch: in case she was not needed on deck she could retire without waking up the rest of the crew. To port, a big desk-writing-table for the charts, navigation books, international code, fog-horn, flares, oil-lamp on gimbals, made everything easy for the captain.

Forward you entered a true pilot's cabin, with two cup-board-beds built on each side with settees in front of them; a big swing-table was screwed in the middle of the floor. Fastened against the forward bulkhead, a bookshelf and a small harmonium gave the finishing touches to our 'saloon'.

But with its uninterrupted floor-space stretching from the mast to the stem, the fo'c'sle was the important part of *Atalante.* To starboard near the door were the navigation lamps, kerosene tins, and the main water tank. Then came our common hanging cupboard, closed only by an oilcloth which allowed the air to circulate, and helped to prevent mildew. The washing-table with a drawer for each of us had a big basin let in, where we could wash much of ourselves when we did not want to unfold the rubber tub. A curtain could be pulled across the forepeak where we had placed a real and expensive yacht-lavatory. (Deep shelves on each side of it contained odorous pots of paint, varnish, enamel, putty, red-lead, candle-grease, brushes, oakum and

turpentine.) This part of our interior equipment had given rise to heated discussions. We had both had enough experience of pump-valves to know that the fewer we had on board, the better. We were believers in the bucket system, which had never given us any trouble; we had found it easy to empty them with unconcern, even alongside the Rothschild's yacht in Monte Carlo. I cannot remember what made us abandon our good custom . . . unless perhaps we were afraid to shock New York!

Against the mast a folding seat was fastened, from where it was possible to hold the pots on the cooking stove against the bulkhead, prepare vegetables on the small pantry table, reach the cups and plates above it, as well as wash the crockery in comfort, in case we could not do it on deck. Our well-planned food-cupboard came next, on the port side; the shelves for bread and vegetables were like lattice work, to keep off the mould as long as possible; lower down, a zinc-lined box contained the potatoes. Then came another water tank with a tap, and beyond it was the tool-shelves where everything had its place as in an engine-room—blocks, shackles, pins, sheaves, marlin-spikes, mallet, files, chisels, spanners, twine, and all you need when you are cut off from the land for weeks. When I mention the chain-locker next to the paint pots, you will know everything we had in our floating world.

When the day's work was done I used to sit on deck for a while looking towards the Atlantic beyond the gulf. A great peace fell on the ebbing water, on the motionless tunny-boats sitting in their mud-beds like hens pleased with their soft wallowing place. . . . The stone walls of far-away Port Louis across the bay reflected the softness of the last hour's light.

My thoughts went to Geneva where at that moment sun-burnt boys, with my brother among them, would be standing in a circle at the Fusterie, discussing which mountain they would ski down next Sunday. . . . At home, Frimousse, my marvellous grey cat, tail up, would be greeting Mother as

she opened the entrance door. . . . At Boulogne on the *Volunteer* the Colonel, waiting for my telegram saying I was too busy to join him. . . . Was it still Revell who laid the dinner table? . . . In Paris gay Paulette, after typing the whole day in her bank, standing in the Metro going back to Neuilly, planning her best team for the Sunday hockey match. At the other end of Paris, calm Geo, having finished selling conjuring tricks for the day, would be buying a slice of ham for her solitary supper, and during the evening she would work at her great scheme: a modern illusionist's box.

Geo . . . she could be a perfect fourth for our crew, full of resource, strong and cold-blooded. As full back in the French international hockey eleven, she was used to saving 'lost' situations. For a few days she had sailed on the Lake with me, and instinctively she had known what to do with the ropes. . . . During the war, disguising her age, she had driven lorries along blown-up roads. She had learnt too much then; when she discussed with Gerbault, they made the nonsense of war become a shrieking truth: how wrong it was that man, the crown of creation, should count no more than a midget. Geo and her personal experiences had opened my eyes to many sickening realities. In her bitter struggle for life she had—much more than myself—good reason to grumble and rebel against the dark influences which strangle the world.

Yes, Geo would have been all right. But alone in the world and penniless, it was too great a responsibility to make her chuck her job. Supposing our cruise went wrong, where would she be? So we decided to try Pa-tchoum's candidate. She was independent and nearly a 'full doctor', which might be useful, and compensate for the fact that she did not know a jib from a topsail. Her name was Marie.

The work was progressing. And I would not have exchanged my place for anywhere else in the world. Yet, curiously enough for no reason, I fell a prey to depression. Outwardly I had everything I could wish for: congenial

work, healthy body, enough to eat, and nice people round me. But inwardly something was living a life of its own. In my note-book, next to drawings of a square sail, some desperate remarks are written:

> For once, remaining quiet, I had the courage to make room in my innermost self so that my deepest feelings surged to the top. It is unbearable. What is the use of it. . . . I discover in myself nothing but emptiness: neither filial love, nor friendship, nor duty, nor goal, nor justification.
>
> No richness of heart, no urge is alive in me.
>
> Pride fills me because I am so good as to try to remain humble when facing the universe or myself.
>
> How sickening this ever-cheating mind is!
>
> The uselessness of writing log-books or money-making articles, is disheartening.
>
> In me nothing but a loneliness without end.
>
> Who can help?
>
> What is the cause of this suffering? . . .
>
> Heavens! Why live?

CHAPTER XII

In the Biscay

To realise our dream, we had to steer *Atalante* safely across the Atlantic. In order to get used to our ship we decided to go tunny-fishing for a fortnight in the Golfe de Gascogne.

Boxes and boxes of provisions poured in. Miette came back tired from weeks of bad weather in the ocean and a diet consisting of nothing but fish soup. She said that good sleep and sunny weather would help her to recover. But I was worried because three years ago, before our first sea-cruise, she had been seriously ill for six months.

By then we were reaping what we had sown and were just pushed along by the events. The rest of our crew arrived. Pa-tchoum, as usual, would be in the starboard watch with the captain; Marie came under my orders and I had to make a sailor of her, if possible. She seemed cheerful enough until she realised that running one's boat meant a lot of dirty work, for instance scraping the fo'c'sle hold. (I had done the rest of the ship myself before replacing the pig-irons, and I had thought it would teach her what a boat looks like under the floor-boards.) Meanwhile, for the first time I was handling my cine-camera with its heavy foot, filming the unloading of the stiff tunnies pressed together, and standing on their heads in the rowing boats. In order to take striking pictures from the crosstree, or from the bowsprit looking at the stem cleaving the sea, I had ordered a battery of accumulators and many yards of waterproof wire, which made the camera work by itself when I needed my hands to hold on tight during a storm.

On the first of August my cameraman arrived . . . with a producer. An earthquake could not have caused a greater

panic on board. There was not a square inch of deck free, as we were bending the sails; there were coils of stiff new hemp ropes full of kinks to be tautened and untwisted before we could use them for the five halliards and their four-fold purchases. In Paris I had carefully chosen my camera-man. To make a film of Cape Horn he had sailed round Tierra del Fuego in a seven-tonner, so that he was used to boats; and as father of a numerous family, he was used to girls. Therefore I knew Miette would not mind his presence too much.* But the producer, what was he doing here? I had never asked him to come; I had decided to pay a cameraman to film good scenes of our fitting out and our life on board. Once at sea I would take our pictures myself. It would be impossible to keep on explaining to this young producer why certain details had to be filmed in a certain way.

But at once this sensitive man took into reckoning the stormy atmosphere; he dealt with it in the only possible way: though embarrassed he remained dignified and asked for my protection. I became perforce a kind of all-round buffer. He was sorry to be intruding but he had to carry out the orders of his company which was lending me my standard-size camera; he knew nothing of what had been settled between us. What was he to do now? He was willing to listen to my suggestions, but could I facilitate his work, and for instance, kindly ask my captain to come on deck so that he could take a shot of our general preparations?

The following days were exhausting. I was responsible for this film. Though I dreaded to bother Miette, at the same time I hated spending uselessly my savings on this expensive business. Our relations improved after the producer had shown his unlimited goodwill by scrubbing the anti-fouling paint off the mate's elbows and washing up the dirty dishes. After eight days he fell in love with all the tough men who live at sea and he disappeared with them

* Concerning the film question Miette had always been hostile to this form of commercialisation.

beyond the horizon in the *Gipsy Queen* to film the tunny-fishing in the Biscay.

According to our agreement the cameraman had to be paid cash in French francs. It was one of the bitterest moments of my life when I discovered—not having read the papers recently—that the franc had recovered. In order to pay what I owed I needed nearly double the amount of Swiss money I had originally set aside. This experience taught me for ever that money is not a thing that keeps well. It is useless to count on it.

"But we've got our brave Captain to thank
That the bowsprit never got mixed with the rudder
A thing, as the Bellman remarked,
That frequently happens in tropical climes
When a vessel is, so to speak, 'snarked'."

LEWIS CARROLL.

Then came the time when *Atalante* tacked about, getting more lively every day. When she knew her way in the bay, and between the buoys off the sleepy village of Kernevel, she was sailed to Port-Tudy, capital of Groix island, by Calloch our sailmaker, a Breton to the backbone. Though he did not look it, with his pointed beard and thick spectacles, he was a great seaman. At the age of twelve he had left home for the first time, and had learnt his job during many tiring fishing expeditions. The war found him all the time at sea running pit-props to Cardiff, having to face U-boats more than once. "We didn't mind them," he said, "as we couldn't be sunk." His hard and thick hands could grip like a vice.

In the harbour Calloch introduced *Atalante* to the company of the tunny boats getting ready to push out once more; she felt like their younger sister, carrying like them a pair of swinging booms pointing to the sky, hoisted up in the crowded anchorage. Some of their deeds were described to her: the races they have to arrive first ashore with the fish,

cramming on every piece of canvas, carrying their balloon jibs too long in fierce sou'westerly gales until the topmast snaps like a match. . . . Slightly shocked, she learned also how the crews of her new brothers booze before going under way; and how next morning the boat, still in the roadstead, is hove to with the ship's boy at the tiller, the men not yet sober—while their wives look from the top of the lighthouse wall with their lace coifs waving in the breeze, shouting unprintable words!

At Groix *Atalante* was taught how to rig her fishing-lines. The bait is a tiny tuft of white horse-hair; the voracious tunny always swallow the bait so that the hook does not need to be barbed. The hook is fastened to a few feet of brass wire, on which the line itself is tied. Every one of the six lines on each swinging boom is a different length and is fitted with an outhaul. Two lines—called the *bonhommes*—are trailed from both sides of the taffrail and one from the top of the mizzen mast. For the fish to be lured, the boat must be doing four knots. The fishes bought by the factory, called *comptables* (warrantables), must weigh more than 12 lbs. The price for a dozen of those 'white tunnies' (germon) varied between eight hundred and twelve hundred francs. The men have only the six months of the good season in which to earn their keep, because in winter the fish disappear somewhere in the Atlantic, and there is no more fishing.

Atalante leaves Groix for her trials with the bigger *Hébé* who is to look after her. They are bound for an imaginary line running across the Biscay from Brittany to Finisterre, not far from the trawling banks, where the tunnies enjoy themselves in summer-time. As we see some fog coming we work out a code with *Hébé*. To indicate when we are running on the starboard tack, we will each blow a short and a long blast.

Atalante's first night at sea . . . I take the middle watch. My joy is mitigated. The playful wind is too light, a heavy swell shakes mightily every loose part of the rigging. Marie

has made a brave effort to appear, but she has gone back: she is sick and I don't need her. Now and then, through a rift, the powerful Belle-Ile lighthouse throws a ray at me. I am annoyed. The little binnacle lamps will not burn for more than ten minutes. Marie will never get the hang of it. I am nearly sick myself. It's good that I have something to do. Fishing-smacks have to carry a white masthead light; ours will not burn up there, with these violent jerks. Blast!

Pa-tchoum takes the morning watch and I give her the course, while drinking some cocoa out of the Thermos. Below, I shall only sleep peacefully after breakfast, when Miette takes charge of the forenoon watch. She knows how to be on the lookout during these continual bangings, which can be dangerous, when the spars with their tackle tear at the bolts fastened on the deck, or when some hooks have not been housed properly.

Soon after mid-day our captain gives us the result of her noon meridian observation: approximate latitude 47°3'. It agrees with our dead reckoning. Miette is not yet able to do her calculations with the point of her knife on the rudder bench like our friends of the cod-fishing fleet. And I cannot guess what she feels (I might learn it in ten years' time . . .) but we are enormously proud of our good captain.

This is great. We are able to sail the seven seas now that we can 'shoot the sun'. Last time we worked with a sextant, North of Sicily, we found our position to be in the southern hemisphere, because we had made a mistake with one of the scientific pluses! . . .

In the distance we see *Hébé* coming alongside a trawler to buy some fish. It means their own lines have caught nothing. The wind is light, irregular; now and then trails of fog blot out the swelling horizon. We don't care much for the soup Pa-tchoum has so courageously prepared. The whitish sunset foretells nothing good, but a storm would be better than this incessant banging.

During the first watch I am so sick that I have to 'feed the fishes' before my tummy feels better.

At last on the morning of the third day out we begin to tack with all our lines at sea. The swell is increasing from the West. In spite of an overcast sky, our spirits are high: we are sailing on fine. In the distance *Hébé*, bouncing with a bone in her teeth, is a vision of grace under her rounded brown sails. Her two huge fishing rods, spread out with their many trailing lines, are like thin arms holding out gossamer threads in the wake of a dancing lady.

We watch our lines, thinking now and then that they are taut. We pull quickly on the outhaul . . . Miette shows us how to do it so fast that the fish will have no time to take the initiative. At the end of the afternoon Miette is on the lookout, for then the tunny goes hunting. She pulls quickly; the line tautens, her effort increases: there is a fish. She reaches the brass wire, the dark tunny is fighting. With a semi-circular sweep of her arm she lands him on the deck, while the stiff line cuts painfully into her sodden hand. The fish is killed by piercing the brain with a marlinspike. The white belly is opened, the fish is gutted and our deck is reddened by the blood. It is a peculiar blood, the antiseptic properties of which bleaches the hands and stings their cuts. We get two tunnies and keep the smaller (just under 12 lbs. for the kitchen. Fresh tunny steaks, when grilled, taste like tender veal. . . .

Next day we catch four more *comptables*. I get so excited about my big one that I shout for help, afraid to lose him. It seems we have got into a shoal; therefore we don't sail away, but spend part of the night hove to. A few masthead lights loom out of the blackness around us, hardly moving.

The fourth day out, as the breeze increases regularly, we hoist the jib No. 2. We take in the topsail; we curse a lot when we discover that its sheet is caught in the gaff somewhere . . . And lowering the gaff is a beastly nuisance in that wind. *Hébé* is nowhere to be seen.

At midnight Miette climbs on deck to take the middle watch, relieving me; she is surprised by, even afraid of, the weight of the wind. *Atalante* lay to so quietly while I was

crouching in the lee of the companion-way that I have failed to notice the new force of the gale. The result is well-deserved abuse for the mate.

"All hands on deck! . . . Take one reef. . . . Show what you can do in the darkness!"

Black sky and black sea are one threatening mass; the tone of the wind's moan in the shrouds has a well-known menacing continuity which makes me uneasy. Before the mast, where it is always draughty, one is deafened by the splash of chopped waves angry at meeting the inert flank of a backing ship. The reefing done, we give three hundred strokes at the pump, throwing back the sea where it belongs, reducing our bilge-water to a decent level under the boards where ballast and empty bottles are lying. Captain and mate renew their strength, thanks to a few good bumpers of thick red wine 'Algerie 12°'; they curse Yves the carpenter who has left an inch of seam uncaulked in the counter. It is so far the only leak we have discovered.

In the morning the gale's whine gets more highly pitched. And the mountainous grey sea lashed by white squalls looks so vicious that we reef all we can. Going "to where a lifting foresail foot is yanking at the sheet", Pa-tchoum takes in the jib, fighting with a mass of thick, wet, stiff canvas which the elements want to tear from her.

During this manœuvre we fall a long way to the leeward of some fishing-smacks. *Atalante* lies to badly now, with her sails not rightly balanced; the staysail might help her, but we are too weary to reef it.

At this moment we remember that our masthead light has not been taken in, as it crashes in a thousand bits on deck!

A few hours later, just before noon, we find the wind has lulled enough to let us hoist sail again. We beat to windward, hoping to find *Hébé* somewhere. For three hours, while tacking, we see no fishing going on. But two unknown 'tunnymen', topsails on and going like smoke, make for the land. We decide to do the same. After all we have been

heartily seasick, it is our fourth day out of sight of land, and we have caught seven tunnies—which is more than our Mentor expected—so we can return and not fear the teasing of our "big brothers". Also (according to the tradition), we have eaten nothing but white tunny all the time; the remaining flesh around the skeleton of the animal we cut is already phosphorescent at night, hanging in the forecastle near the pots of paint. It means we must quickly bring our catch back. You cannot salt tunny; like money it does not keep well. Many a skipper has lost a week's catch because he wanted to stay out and bring back more than his pals; fog coming along for an hour or two has been enough to turn the whole cargo bad. Each fish is kept separate from the others, hung by its tail on rows of trestles propped on deck.

Our course is reaching, but unluckily so much astride the swell that we have to haul the mainsheet taut to avoid terrifying lurches of the boom. It is so unbearable that we must even lower the mainsail. And we have a ticklish job to control the swerving gaff, while being thrown about violently ourselves. To-day it looks fine to have a hand-rail with stanchions on top of the bulwark!

Another unpleasant night watch begins. The dampness makes my feet cold inside woollen socks and wooden clogs. It is cheerful to know that once we have started on our long cruise, life will be less tiring. We shall be on the same tack for days in trade-winds one can trust; away from the tramps' highroads, where the lookout need not be so particular. . . . As this thought flicks by I move to leeward searching the horizon once more . . . And there, over me, I see a white light, a masthead one, nearly motionless and so high up that we ought to be alongside a ship of some sort. I can hear nothing, outline nothing. . . . It is uncanny, terrifying. Does it mean an imminent smash against the invisible? What must I do? . . . Shall I shout? I haven't time to light a flare! Could it be the light of a distant and very big trawler?

Silently the luminous dot passes away. Nothing has happened.

Life is like that: things hardly ever happen. In a novel it would have been the moment chosen for a tragic collision, sending *Atalante* to the bottom while her fair crew are saved by brawny men bound for a lonely treasure island. . . .

We finish our night peacefully under the jib and the spanker. But nobody can sleep properly with this continual rolling. The dull dawn discloses huge, parallel billows, slow moving, irregularly white-capped. None of us is very keen to work or to eat, but we all agree that as a training week it has been a perfect one indeed. We take some soup; otherwise we live mainly on biscuits and condensed milk.

At mid-day our latitude is 47°.04. We are overtaken by three tunnymen going with all their sails set. "*Marche ou crève*" must be their motto. They don't care if something gives way, as the ship-owner will pay, I suppose. Nevertheless it makes us ashamed of ourselves; and pale Marie manages to give a hand on deck when we hoist the mainsail again.

The yellow sun is setting during my spell at the helm. I search the East for a sign of the land. And there while the horizon is clear for a few minutes, I see, coming from somewhere far below, three pale beams from a lighthouse. But this sign made by man is soon absorbed by the thickening haze.

We are puzzled. The thrilling game of making a landfall takes place once more. I must have seen one of the most powerful lighthouses of the coast. But it can't have been Belle-Ile, as we are not so far South.

In spite of our steady going, it is only four hours later that we can identify the phare d'Eckmühl. At last we start the new tack which will bring us to Lorient. In the West we pick up Les Glenéns throwing a tragic dark-red glare into the surrounding blackness. . . . But in the South, Pen Men on the Groix island is a bright comforting sight.

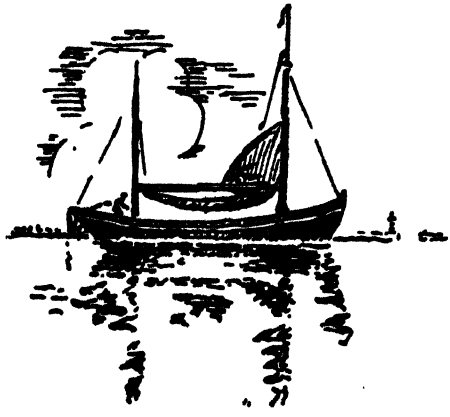
Atalante knows now where she is. She sails smartly

through the sardine fishing fleet in the colourful morning. Her crew sings the ship-song which is a variation on the tune:

"Ils étaient deux, ils étaient trois
Ils étaient trois matelots de Groix."

Our slender fishing booms are topped. The dinghy is lowered off Port Louis, anchor and chain ready. . . . After seven days at sea we sight again our tunny-fish canning factory. *Atalante*, sails furled, is soon motionless.

Our tunnies are still good. We have kept them in the shade of the dinghy, sprinkling them with sea water. This small catch is fetched with enthusiasm by the girls of the factory. We learn that one of our big brothers has come back empty-handed as all his fishes have gone bad.



CHAPTER XIII

The End of Our Dream

Though our captain was still very weak from liver trouble, we decided to start for Spain as quickly as possible. At high tide we brought our boat alongside the quay to fill our extra tanks with fresh water. The manœuvre was already finished and the crew dismissed, when the owner of the shipyard appeared saying that the water-pipe would not be long enough and that we must quickly move ten yards ahead. Though we told him our heel had once touched ground, he moved our line to the next bollard. The water was ebbing fast. Heaving on by hand seemed to have no result. So he shouted: "All hands on deck! . . ." and after a while, "Where the hell is Marie?" My poor apprentice appeared at the fo'c'sle hatch, her head white with soapsuds. He greeted her with the amazing appellation of: "Tourist. . . !" in which he put such scorn that she will never hear this word again without a start.

We had no time to explain that she was not guilty. We pulled as hard as we could on the winch. Then somebody came to fetch our man on important business: the quay was deserted! We had moved about five yards and stopped for good.

Heavens! what was going to happen at low water? *Atalante* was away from the wall she ought to be leaning on. Something must be done before she began heeling towards the channel. We pulled on the stern-line, which parted! Nobody on the quay . . . So we shall have to jump, as we must have another line ashore amidships. Quick . . . But what a jump to make with no take off!

I did it . . . landing like a frog on top of the wall. Line

made fast, the girls pulled until their backs seemed to stretch under the strain. No success. The result of our stranding was visible already: *Atalante* leaned over—but thanks to our recent efforts—towards the quay. Soon the shrouds and their ratlines were within reach of an easy jump: I climbed down on board.

We could do no more. It was worrying. If our forty-five tons were to rest on the point of a rock in the middle of our planking, there would soon be a hole. And with such a list who knew how she would react to the flood? Would she righten herself before the sea reached her sky-light?

As we sat on a deck every minute uncannily more inclined, I felt a warm stickiness in my canvas shoe. What? My dungaree was black with blood. And under it, on the shin, a deep cut was gaping, a thick bloody rim on top and a whitish core deep down.

"You will need a few stitches," said Marie, "as well as anti-tetanic serum. You've cut yourself jumping on the quay which is covered with old fish-scales. . . ."

A funny scene followed. I was lying, not so much on the settee as on the bulkhead of the starboard 'cupboard bunks', because of our list. Marie was threading her silk, while the whole crew gathered near me to collect for the ship's annals the string of rare Swiss curses the mate was bound to let go. . . . But I chose to bite my finger instead, so that nothing but a pig's groan came forth when Marie had to pull hard on her sewing.

Real pain began when everything ought to have been finished. The tetanic injection had been done in the fat of my abdomen and Marie had left some cotton-wool with iodine on the needle's hole. No sooner had she retired into her room to set her hair than I yelled that she had set me on fire! "I know, I know," she said in a doctoral tone, ". . . don't be so soft!" That made me shut up, and respectful of Science, I did nothing. But Marie gasped when she took away the cotton pad: my middle was adorned with a

nice blister, the scar of which was to keep me company for many years. . . .

Out of the lee bunkers of *Atalante* we took the tins, the bottles and the spare chain, which we carried on the quay, so as to lighten the hull and help her to straighten up. At low-tide we could see that the planking was slightly staved in at one place! Yves would have to do some patching up, so much was clear. And I had better not try to remember what we said about the man who had called Marie a 'tourist'. . . .

At last we were ready. The planking had been mended; and 100 lbs. of potatoes had found their way to their special bunker. Once more we ate a *bouillabaisse* with the Terrious and drank a last glass with everybody. I kissed the playful kitten, I stroked Plancton the dog. The last letter home had gone, giving Vigo, Spain, c/o. French Consul, as our next address; and to express my feelings, in that letter I had copied a passage from I can't remember where. It ran:

> "All such partings leave one a little sad and serious, and in that family farewell there was the thought that we might never meet again on this side of the grave. But after all that thought does not affect a family of sailors too much. The risks of seafaring life are accepted as a matter of course. My father and mother had said good-bye to their sons many times before and there was no reason to be miserable or melancholy on this occasion."

We were standing by.

On the first of September we left our anchorage. There was no wind and I towed *Atalante* out, rowing in the dinghy, singing at the top of my voice a pot-pourri of home songs. I admired the poise with which *Atalante* moved in the water, and I could see now that she had tumbling-home sides.

The weather was nice and the glass high. We left Groix

behind us and tried to steer W. by S., the straight course for Spain. But the wind forced us to sail S.W. by S. During the whole night the sea remained flat, the breeze weak, and we could see the three lights of Glénans, Pen Men, and Goulphar on Belle-Ile. At four o'clock in the morning we took in the topsail and the spanker; the wind had jumped to N.W., bringing with it a fog. We saw three graceful tunnymen with white hulls and bright-coloured bulwarks. At one p.m. hoisted the spanker.

By seven p.m. covered 100 miles which was not very good considering that we had been more than thirty-six hours at sea. Furled staysail and spanker while porpoises plunged noisily by our side, breeze freshening. Hoisted jib No. 2, as we had decided to spend the night hove-to in order to have a good sleep.

Next day the weather was grand, the wind favourable and the sea was a warm ultramarine-blue, sprinkled with shining crests of creamy whiteness. . . . But it was not enough to cure our captain. She was just as weak as when she had come back from her scientific cruise. Her inside was permanently upset. She only came on deck when all hands were needed. Marie being still useless, it meant much work for Pa-tchoum and myself. We carried on for another glorious day. But before any discussion had taken place we knew what our decision was going to be. Yet we said: " 'It's the one way or the other, Mr. Jackson,' " he replied, using once more Stevenson's verse which had helped us to state many a dilemma so far. Either we would land our captain in the Vigo hospital, at the far end of Spain, or else we would bring her back to France where she could find out much more quickly what was wrong with her. The line to follow was so obvious, the necessity so imperative, that the seemingly impossible half-turn was begun: in the middle of the Biscay *Atalante* gybed, sailing northwards for Le Palais, Belle-Ile, the nearest port. Not a word was lost. We knew we were wise. We thought that later perhaps, we might try once more. . . .

Calmly we retraced our course, which had left no track on the sea—only in our minds. I avoided thinking, then. To-day I know well how horrible that moment was. We turned our backs to the sun, our god: we were not meant to follow him around half the world. *Atalante*, fruit of our dream, long training and much effort, *Atalante* real at last, though hardly born, it was your decline already. You are my lost paradise, nothing prevents me from imagining the perfect success which might have crowned your completed course.

Lost, not only the miraculous life out of time away from our continent, but also the intense and real life on 'my' deck, in 'my' cabin, where nothing was ruled but the constant understanding with Miette. How sad she was and how self-possessed! *Atalante* meant so much to both of us and we loved her so truly. What could I have done for Miette? Nothing, except prevent her from seeing my own sadness. . . . It meant not letting her look into my eyes. I dared not think about our twenty boxes of provisions, about my contract with the cinema company, about what I was going to do. Was I meant to go back to my continent, learn to love it and to find a link between us both?

I would not, I could not yet look into the future. *Atalante* was now under my feet, it meant a great achievement, and I wanted to take leave of her as late as possible. I wrote a letter to Picci, my cousin, saying she had to take a month's leave from her horticultural school, so that she could help to sail the most lovely pilot-boat there ever was round the coast of Brittany. I had thought of Geo, of course, but it was no use upsetting her life in Paris for so short a time.

Without difficulty we reached the east side of Belle-Ile, and entered the harbour of Le Palais; our stern was made fast to the lighthouse jetty.

To the West, across the harbour, were the houses and cafés near the landing-stage of the daily steamer from the mainland. To the North, overlooking the harbour, rose the old fort, now a penitentiary for boys. These boys were

sometimes taken to sea on fishing expeditions; their 'tunny boat' was alongside ours, and they tried to awaken our pity, asking for cigarettes with discreet mimicry. They were far from good-looking, with their clean-shaven heads, and we heard that some of them had already escaped twice from the fort.

We wanted to try a few days' complete rest for Miette. And in the meantime we visited the local shipyard where everything was oak-built, we walked across the island to visit the awe-inspiring Apothicairie cave resounding under the massive attacks of the Atlantic; and on the roadstead we boarded ships back from Newfoundland. Their crews had been at sea for months, leading one of the hardest lives there is, and now they were waiting for orders telling them where to land the salted cod which filled their holds.

On their decks, all the flat-bottomed dorys put on top of each other made an imposing pile. We explored the fo'c'sle of the *Cancalais* where sixteen men lived in bunks similar to those of *Atalante*. They referred to themselves as *bonhommes:* "There are twenty more *bonhommes* who live aft," we learnt. Though they looked quite wild they were not half so rough as we had expected, for men deprived of wives and other shore amenities for so many months. On the contrary, it was with shy and gentle manners that they offered us coffee in blackened mugs and led us up the ratlines, teaching us how to negotiate the overhanging futtock shrouds. Aloft, the wind was more scented and more caressing than near the water, from so high up, the deck seemed almost non-existent, covering only such a tiny surface of the sea. . . . From the foretop I caught a glimpse of the dull, desolate coast seen through the rigging of the main and mizzen masts.

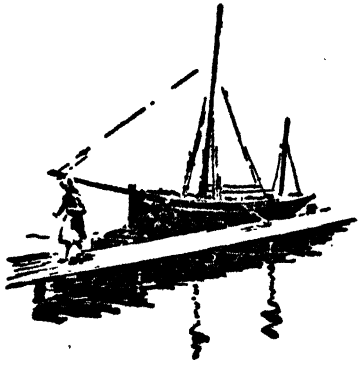
The captain took us to his cabin, decorated with cigarette-cards and pervaded by a strong smell of mildew. He showed us the nasty scars left on the men's wrists by wet oilskins chafing while they row or while they handle their lines. He told us about their life. They fish for months until the hold is

full: the resulting catch ought to fetch approximately one and a half million French francs. On the Banks they keep in touch with each other by wireless so that they can rush to where the shoal is. Whatever the weather, at two o'clock in the morning all the dorys rôw out with two men in each. Every dory has charge of 2,000 hooks (30 lines with 70 hooks on each). At ten o'clock they come back for their breakfast, taken with coffee or white wine.

We took leave of the *Cancalais* and then climbed on board the *Armoricain*, equally well-kept with all the whippings of her rigging lately renewed: we declared ourselves pleased with our inspection! While the captain opened for us 'his' bottle of champagne, we listened to the story of the *Kléber*, a lovely white ship quite near us. She had received the 'croix de guerre' because the U-boat which had attacked her had been forced to retreat, frightened by her deck-gun concealed until the last minute.

The crew, their wide worn-out blouses loose in the wind, their shapeless caps tilted rakishly over their ears, cheered us when we left, exchanging *sotto voce* dubious jokes, and shouting out loud if we did not need a ship's boy on *Atalante*.

Miette was going to leave for Paris. The silence on board was heavy with sadness. These hours were so painful that I wanted to run away. And I did.



CHAPTER XIV

Escape with the "Amenartas"

Next to us in the harbour of Le Palais there was an English motor-yacht, the fifty-four tons *Amenartas*, named after a pharaoh by her owner, Count Blucher. (Ten years before she had been born a motor-launch whose job it was to chase U-boats during the war.) One night, when the *Amenartas* was tied to the big mooring buoy at the entrance of Le Palais, she had been nearly cut in two by the small cargo-boat plying between the island and Quiberon.

A hell of a law case had ensued. The owner had gone away leaving his engineer in charge. The yacht was accused of having had no riding light. The engineer pretended this was not true and that he had had a man on watch. He said that the whole business would have to be discussed by the insurance companies and he wanted to go back to England at once. But things worked in a queer way. The yacht's side had been patched up strongly by the Guillaume ship-yard at the end of the dock and the repairs were declared sound by a Lorient surveyor. Lloyd's agents completed their enquiries. But the lock-keeper refused to open the dock, saying he had received orders from the cargo boat's company to that effect.

The yacht was in the outer harbour when her engineer asked me if I had three days to spare, as he needed a deck-hand to help him carry out a plan he had made to escape from the authorities. He had arranged secretly with a pilot friend in Guernsey to come over by that afternoon steamer. As soon as he would be on board we were going to steal away; and Pa-tchoum was to rescue the abandoned dinghy we would have no time to hoist aboard. Well, it was a lovely

dinghy, and at the sight of such a prize our pirate instincts were awakened. Miette and I had planned that instead of heaving up the anchor (which was a useful patent one), I would slip the chain through the hawse-pipe and put a buoy on it, for her to pick up later.

I did not care if the engineer lied when he said that the authorities had no right to keep him under arrest, as he was not a merchantman but a yacht flying the Blue Ensign. I was longing to forget *Atalante* for a while: a few days at sea seemed good, especially with a pilot who could teach me a lot about the coast of Brittany.

The daily steamer was sighted, entered harbour and came alongside. Warren, our pilot from Guernsey, was rowed across. *Amenartas* was under way at once . . . taking her chain and anchor on board! She pushed out to sea towing her dinghy and followed by the heart-broken gaze of *Atalante's* crew. . . . Full speed ahead, the yacht passed the lighthouse, her siren giving three triumphant blasts.

In spite of his age and his bald head, the engineer behaved like an excited child. He was escaping from a conspiracy, he said. Everyone wanted to see the expensive repairs to his yacht carried out in France, and they plotted to prevent him from leaving the harbour.

Later I learned that the steamer which had brought Warren carried in her mail-bag a letter ordering the *Amenartas* to be arrested till judgment day at Nantes. Had we delayed another half-hour, escape would have been impossible.

It had certainly been a serious collision on that dark night. . . . The yacht had heeled over so much that the sea had poured in through the portholes. Under water she owed her life to her copper-sheathing, and above sea-level, her water-tank had acted as shock-absorber. The bow-anchor of the tramp had come right through, smashing the mayonnaise bottle in the pantry. . . .

We had just begun a forty hours' journey which was something of a race—a race against time. Warren had to go

back to his Custom-house as soon as possible. I wanted to be back at Belle-Ile for the arrival of Picci. The engineer was continually busy with his Diesel engines, oiling and supervising them. We were three in turn at the helm: Hobbs the paid-hand who fed us mainly with cold lobster, myself, and Warren who hardly ever left the wheel-house. Small Warren had a black moustache and looked more of a townsman than a seaman.

During the first night, we passed many lights I knew already, the red glow of La Teignouse in the Quiberon bay, the sweeping rays from Belle-Ile and Groix. Towards morning, La Vieille lighthouse loomed ahead of us, in the middle of the dangerous Raz de Sein. Successively all its sectors appeared, passing from green to white, to red, and back to white. There a sailing-boat cannot beat through if wind and tide are against her. But we met such a flat calm that many fishing smacks were motionless under their flaccid sails, and the lighthouse perched on its rock looked as useless as a toy.

Sleep claimed me until we came off the Brest roadstead, the bearings of which I wanted to study. We made for the Chenal du Four near the mainland. To port, in the West, a string of islands stretched as far as Ushant; rocky, wild, desolate islands from where the best sailors of France come. . . .

We took our departure from the Ile de la Vierge in the south-east, where the tall lighthouse, clearly outlined on the horizon, stood like a gigantic candle. Our course laid N.E. to Portland Bill. Warren told me about Count Blucher's father, who long ago had had a row with the German Kaiser and took leave of him, saying he would make English subjects of his children. The family was really of Swedish descent, but when northern Germany was annexed, they served the Prussian king in order to keep their possessions. They now own cotton-plantations in Egypt—hence the name of the yacht—and forests in Czechoslovakia. Our owner was the grandson of the famous Blucher; and

(charming detail), the doctor who presided at his birth had to be brought to Guernsey on the family schooner *Sea Mermaid.* To-day there are still many Napoleonic relics in his house.

I did not enjoy our navigation very much. The fumes of burnt oil could be smelt everywhere. But I resented mainly the fact that we worked neither with the wind, the tides nor the waves. There was nothing that mattered except our arrogant will which drew through space this absolutely straight line of our course. A car, a train are enslaved by the road, by the rail; only an aeroplane could have been less considerate of its surroundings.

We passed many tramps. We danced in a swell, and my lobster inside me no longer felt at home. Fog blanketed everything during the night; we had to blow the horn regularly and slow down to half-speed. Then at last the bulkheads stopped their shaking shivering rattle for a while.

St. Catherine's Head was sighted in the morning. Against the ebb we crawled, passing Yarmouth. Soon after mid-day the *Amenartas* was safely in a mud berth at Kemp's shipyard, off Southampton Royal Pier. For the first time since I had joined her, her heart of metal stopped beating. At seven in the evening Warren and I were rowed across to the French steamer. We climbed on board and bought our tickets.

But difficulties began when I showed my alien passport. According to that document, I had not set foot on British soil, and how could it be that I wanted to make for France, leaving a country where I had not been! Things looked awfully muddled and nobody knew what was going to happen to *Atalante's* mate. Every explanation I produced only made me look more of a suspicious character. Why was I in a hurry to go back to my own yacht in Brittany? I did not look much of a yachtswoman in my dungarees anyhow . . . (I had not changed yet.) And what was that story about helping a distressed neighbour who wanted

to run away from the French authorities? Luckily a Customs chap came round. He had seen me on the *Amenartas* a few hours ago and had noticed our dinghy boarding the steamer. They believed me at last. But they told me not to do it again! According to the rules, I should have left the *Amenartas* only in the presence of an immigration officer. . . .

Next morning I landed at the Gare St. Lazare in canvas shoes. I saw Miette, about whom no diagnosis had yet been made. Our film producer was on his way to Spitzbergen, and said that the scenes filmed on the *Atalante* were good. Next night I was in the train *en route* for Belle-Ile. But the *Amenartas* story was not finished.

The engineer had thought it would be amusing to get in touch with the Press. On the evening of our arrival at Southampton, the London papers had a front-page story. Under the title "YACHT'S DASH! ESCAPE FROM PORT WITH GIRL AS QUARTERMASTER" appeared many mis-statements. I was supposed to be French, acting as quartermaster after having offered my services; one paper even said I had left harbour with nothing less than a pistol in my trouser pocket. This typical journalistic product could do me nothing but harm (unless it enticed a film company to buy me for my weight in gold). It might even make me lose my amateur status in case I wanted to steer in regattas under the International Yacht Racing Rules. Said to be French, I might find myself in difficulties with the French authorities for having snatched the yacht from them. . . . Last but not least, I learned that my name could hardly be mentioned with Countess Blucher! I wrote to her that I was not responsible for these foolish stories. The Nantes daily paper, *Le Phare*, reproduced the English article; I had to ask them to clear me by publishing my denial.

As for my friends in Paris and London, they wrote congratulating me on having staged such a first-class publicity trick in order to sell the sailing film we had been making last summer!

CHAPTER XV

We Join "La Françoise"

Picci, my cousin, was already familiar with *Atalante* when I returned on board. Though we were by then a very amateurish crew, we decided to explore the Baie de Quiberon. We longed to leave Le Palais, which linked us with sad memories, so we tried to come out of harbour in spite of a very weak and capricious head wind. *Atalante* missed stays, drifted towards the rocks and had to let go her heavy hook before she could send her manila hawser on the lighthouse jetty.

Later, completely becalmed near the dangerous breakers of La Teignouse, we rowed for all we were worth so that the fast flood should not overwhelm us.

Tacking with all our canvas set, we had a glorious sail up the Crach river among a fleet of sardine smacks, fighting against the gurgling ebb. We anchored off La Trinité, to the windward of four topsail schooners, lovely trading craft of that part of the world. . . . Too lazy to disentangle our lead-line to take a sounding, I asked some neighbouring fishermen if we were anchored in the right place. Reassured by their answer, we turned in for supper.

Two hours later a dinghy full of local yachtsmen in white flannels, one of them bearded and imposing, came to warn us that we were on the bank; we had to move. The ebb of the September tide was racing so madly that it was hard work to gain ground even with the help of the kedge anchor and the windlass. Our new friends helped us most charmingly. But they had made a mistake, because after all our efforts, we found ourselves aground, luckily on soft mud. Our yachtsmen decided to stay with us in order to rescue

us from our dangerous anchorage. The sherry bottle and the gramophone appeared on a deck inclining every minute nearer to the vertical. Following Monsieur de Kerviler's advice, we streamed the kedge anchor, fastened on to the throat halliard, so that when the flood came we could help her up by hauling on the purchase.

It was not until three o'clock in the morning that we found ourselves afloat again and safely moored up-channel. For the first time I was experiencing the amazing rush of current created by the tides of the equinox. Since that day I have a mighty respect for the power of the moon.

For a weary mariner, the Riviére de Crach was most soothing. The flood carried our dinghy far inland, running beside pine-woods, passing luscious meadows dotted with cows, discovering here and there a discreet manor. After a picnic on a bed of pine-needles, we would go back to our lovely ship. In the evenings, under the soft light of the oil lamp, we read Slocum's *Sailing Alone* or Bullen's *Cruise of the Cachalot*, whilePicci adapted Grieg's music to the harmonium.

Another day we explored the Houat island. The sandy beach was deserted; we challenged each other, we gambolled and swam, in carefree nakedness; we might have been in the South Seas.

Marie decided that her doctor's degree was to be tackled again, and she left for Paris. It would have been silly for us three to sail heavy *Atalante* along this difficult coast. Personally I wanted to behave like the ostrich and put my head in the sand to avoid seeing what was ahead of me: I dreaded going back to Paris. Then, Picci, Pa-tchoum and I decided to sign on the roll of *La Françoise*, one of the schooners anchored near us.

She was sailing in ballast for Jersey, where she had some wooden furniture to pick up. Le Bideau, her captain, said he could share his mate's bunk, so as to give us the use of his big 'cupboard berth'. We brought our bedding and our food with us. *Atalante* was left at La Trinité in charge of Rouzic, a local sailor.

Six days were spent at sea. Happy days with no smelly noise from an engine, forging ahead in the teeth of the whole world. As with *Atalante* we were becalmed near the Teignouse of evil repute, so much becalmed that our 160 tons schooner made two turns on herself. We used to have supper at half-past five with the skipper. Then I took the watch with the mate until ten p.m. We soon found that it was not quite perfect down below with the three of us in the bunk, even when we had Picci's head at our feet to allow for more elbow room. . . . Rather than stifle in that unorthodox position, Picci preferred to keep watch with Le Bideau.

"Outside was the ship's rush to the wind's hurry."

Once past the gulf of Morbihan, I began to recognise all the capes and islands seen from the escaping *Amenartas* not long ago.

At noon, with hardly any wind at all, we slid past La Vieille in the middle of the Raz: it was shifting day for the hermits of the lighthouse, and they were hoisting provisions along the rocks.

In the Chenal du Four beyond the Pointe de St. Mathieu, navigation became thrilling. There, tacking against wind and tide by light breeze, we found ourselves racing the three-masted schooner *M. A. James, Plymouth*, slowly overtaking her. As we were smarter in stays than she was, the tide had less time during which to push us backwards. All the islands to the west were haloed in mist: they seemed to be adrift in the sky.

La Françoise was sailed by a crew of five, the captain, Xavier the mate, Guénnec and Felix the hands, and the ship's boy whose voice I hardly ever heard. Picci, not quite used to roughing it—at home she was called 'the Princess' because she had been brought up in Russia among many servants just before the Revolution—came to me quite shocked. "Well, really," she said, "do you know how we get our drinking water? There is a rubber pipe coming out of the water tank, and the boy sucks at it. . . ."

She called me dirty when I said it was all right with me. But I did not mind this adjective; Miette had fallen into the habit of using it lavishly on me after she had discovered that Alain Gerbault and I could turn up at breakfast with our teeth unwashed. This lack of education (or feeling) stood me in good stead when I was to drink Tibetan tea out of a wooden bowl previously licked clean by a lama's tongue* . . . But in one instance we agreed about what we would not stand, and we conspired every morning to throw overboard the water of our ablutions! Le Bideau, with the habit ingrained in every seaman, wanted to save as much as possible from his fresh water provision. We discovered that the breakfast mugs were rinsed in our wash-basin . . . So every morning one of us would pace the deck leisurely, watching Le Bideau's movements, and give a shout when all was clear. Then the basin would appear through the skylight to be emptied overboard.

The jovial captain, with his round red face, was very much the master on board. After supper he enjoyed telling stories which we gullibly swallowed. He imitated the way in which he and his friends spoke English when they went to Cardiff with their shipments. Or he would tell us of the time when he was in a warship off the Senegal coast; the officers thought they were near Dakar, but somehow could not recognise the landmarks. Finally they shouted to natives in dug-outs: "Where are we?" They were off St. Louis, some hundred miles too far to the north. . . . But in his best story, he loved to describe the excitement caused ashore at Le Havre, when his three-masted ship swept into harbour under full canvas, her crew of agile niggers concealed in the rigging. When disaster seemed inevitable, a whistle blew and like magic every piece of canvas was down in a minute, the boat losing way under bare poles.

Pa-tchoum, our 'man of letters' kept a diary, and it delighted the captain to read it. It was new to him that his everyday life could be of interest.

* A lama is a monk, not an animal.

Xavier the mate was less exuberant. He had a high and pensive forehead, a long, wild, fair moustache, and good blue eyes full of kindness. His wife had run away not long before, if I remember right.

Windless and motionless was our second night at sea, off the candle-like Phare de la Vierge. The boy, sleeping under the long-boat, dreamt aloud, repeating: "Paris—Madrid . . ." They were the words with which—I never learnt why—we greeted every going about, when the staysail traveller slid along from one end of the horse to the other, ending with a terrific bang against the buffer.

In the day-time, Guénnec was painting the long-boat; in secret he had asked me to find a yacht on which he might work. He thought it was time he had a change. Neither of us could have guessed that within a year we would be shipmates once more.

Again during the following night, the *Françoise* met hardly any wind, but she was then riding on a long swell. Many steamers were seen moving along the northern horizon. The weather became quite warm, especially in our musty bunk; and secretly we were hoping to meet a storm. We wanted to see the kind of wind that the men called 'really bad weather' and we longed to see how they would tackle a gale. . . .

During the afternoon we saw the Captain empty into a tub thirty bottles labelled 'Kirsch' or 'Eau-de-vie'. He took us into his confidence. "Don't be afraid," he said, "I am not mad. They were only filled with water, a fact unknown to the customs man who let us ship them out of bond one day at Auray. We will have them filled with real liquor at Jersey. And when we shall be home again, it is so many bottles on which my friend the merchant will have no tax to pay . . ."

The fourth night, we picked up quite a few lights to sail by: l'Ile aux Moines, les Héaux and later the Plateau des Roches Douvres, all of them dangerous places responsible for many wrecks in this sea harried by fierce tides. To the east of these

waters, five years hence the *Firecrest* was to meet her end. Born at Rowhedge in Essex, the little cutter had dodged Atlantic gales as well as coral reefs in the Pacific Ocean before she came back to France at the end of her round-the-world cruise. She was old and strained in every fastening, but so loved by Gerbault that he refused to sell her to an American millionaire. He preferred to give her to the French Naval Museum. But she was not to end in a tub of cement; she sank half-way between Cherbourg and Brest, while being towed by a destroyer.

With a freshening breeze our sailing was marvellous, tacking now towards the island of Sark, then through the Déroute towards St. Ouen's Bay on the west coast of Jersey. During a few glorious moments the dying sun turned the shore into glowing purple earth.

We rounded La Corbiére Point to see with astonishment that no pilot was in the bay. We sailed as far as the St. Brelade's Bay to give him time to appear. But nothing came except the night. . . . "We'll have to lie to until to-morrow," said the captain, "just because them blinking 'Jacks' choose to observe their Sunday."

Yes, it was Sunday, the third of October, but nobody was in a hurry, and it did not matter if twelve more hours were spent at sea. . On deck, all through the night, the wind maintained its deep, unceasing whistling music, while pushing, pressing, weighing against a motionless ship.

In the morning, the busy pilot suggested that we should wait for the tug which came out at high tide. As we refused this expensive way of doing things, we had to beat towards St. Helier, clear and bright under a ray of the sun—tacking twenty times in a roadstead full of hidden rocks . . . twenty times for the boy to yell 'Paris—Madrid!'

The tug only met us in the outside harbour, and left us aground at the entrance of the second 'bassin'. We had a strong line on the quay, and gradually, as the flood lifted us, we heaved in until we managed to sneak into the dock and be secure at last.

Le Bideau rushed ashore to 'his *bonnes Soeurs*' as he called them, Catholic Sisters whose furniture he had to take back to Brittany. In the meantime I had swopped a bottle of spirits for a big lobster. And our last supper took place. Once more we heard jokes about us, the *poulies coupées*, which is the name for girls in sailor's slang. We had decided not to go back with *La Françoise* as I did not like to leave *Atalante* for too long.

We took the steamer for St. Malo after shaking hands with Warren, my pilot friend from the *Amenartas*.

Looming out of an evening mist, the fortified town of St. Malo was incredibly beautiful, much more a fairy-tale vision than a reality; I felt that anyone brought up in one of those proud houses would have, for ever after, an innate knowledge of beauty.

Because we stopped to look at the many cod-fishing boats in harbour, we missed the evening train for la Trinité, and had to sleep in the station waiting-room.

As always it was a joy to see *Atalante* again, her tanned furled sails, her buff-coloured deck, her black-enamelled hull with its white line along her bulwark. Picci had to go back. Monsieur de Kerviler lent us his best sailor and another man to bring *Atalante* back to her shipyard near Lorient.

Nothing else remained to be done but to lay up, a most disheartening work when you do not know if there will ever be another fitting out.

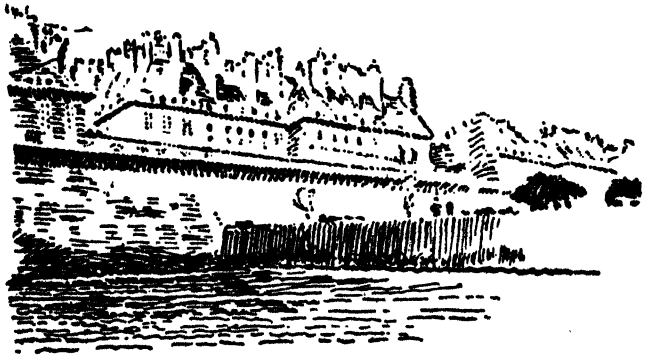
Suddenly it was too much for me: I could not bear it any longer. I did not behave like a good mate. Before every part of my ship had been put to sleep, so that she would not fear the cold gales and drizzles of the lonely winter, I ran away.

Pa-tchoum was left in charge of the last jobs to be done. I unpinned the photographs of *Perlette* and *Bonita* which had been on the bulkheads. I knelt a last time in front of our navigation desk, reaching for my pencil and for the cine-camera wedged between the battery of accumulators and one frame. A last time I looked under my mattress where I

used to keep my ducks and my sou-wester. . . . The keys of the hatches' padlocks were in their corner at the bottom of the book shelf. . . . A last time I sat pensively on the taffrail by the little brass plate I had screwed in for the log. And then I cried, while looking at the mud in which *Atalante* had made her hole.

What is it that makes us love a boat so much? If it is because of her reduced space where everything is within reach, then are we not silly to live in big houses? . . . If it is because of the homely appearance of the wood she is built of, then we ought not to live inside concrete walls covered with paper. . . . It is not the fact of being afloat which makes us happy, because I have lived many times 'high and dry' and still had in me the same tender feeling. No, I think it is something else. It is the boat with its surrounding spirit that stirs us, a thing complete in itself, independent . . . with a character of its own. It is a sensible creation of which every part has a *raison d'être.*

As I walked away I did not dare turn back. But *Atalante* in her own manner was saying good-bye, with her taut halliards drumming madly against the mast.



PART III

CHAPTER XVI

A New Hope . . .

I had tried to find a job which would show me something of the world. But I did not succeed. From the Grenfell Labrador Mission I received a letter saying that girls were only engaged for hospital or school work, and that after they had signed a three years' contract.

The man from the Hudson Bay Company who had promised a friend of mine that he would help me, had vanished from the scene . . .

The rich Swiss who had said that he needed me to cure the skins of his trophies during his next big game shooting expedition, had not meant it seriously.

Left to myself I could not decide what to do. But in the meantime I was deeply grateful not to be obliged to work at all costs.

I cannot remember much about the winter which followed *Atalante's* cruise. I have written to my mother lately asking her to send me my old pocket diaries in which there must be traces of my occupations. They have left Geneva, but have not yet reached India where I am writing, enjoying during war-time, the relative peace that distance creates. Maybe the censor has been puzzled by my hieroglyphics standing for friends' nicknames, or goals scored in hockey matches; and in these pages, numbers written next to a mountain's name mean so many falls during ski runs. Never mind the delayed diaries. They only mean that I have lost trace of a few months.* I want now to go ahead in this

* I received them at last when I didn't need them any more.

quest of the past. I dislike brooding over the old days as it makes me feel self-conscious, like an actress thinking too much about herself: "What did I look like during that scene? Was I sincere or was I cheating? Did I suggest the wrong mood?

But my Christmas holidays are clearly remembered, because they were spent on skis. The snowy mountains in their muffled kingdom knew we were theirs: they claimed us year after year. As usual it was taken for granted that my brother and I would not be present during the annual meeting of the Maillart 'clan'. It was only some twelve years later, when the increasing popularity of wintersport had filled every village bed and hut dormitory with unbearable crowds of ski-ing neophytes, that we appeared in the family circle for the New Year banquet. . . .

Every year, on the 24th of December, we used to climb for two hours towards a mountain hut, with a thirty-pound rucksack on the back, full of cakes, meat and wine. Night would slowly creep up accompanied by a chilly wind which dried the sweat on our foreheads. Bright dots would begin to shine in the colourless sky, and in the village at our feet.

After a while we meet no more houses and hoarse dogs no longer herald our approach; the narrowing footpath is less stained with cow-dung. We have entered the realm of the Wind: the mountain-side where he rules and where he whistles through the silky needles of the fir-trees. There our ski-boots without nails slip in the frozen tracks: falls are annoying because it is difficult to get up again with such a weight on one's back. They break the rhythm of one's climb and make the steep path look unfriendly. Some tough chaps like Popol or Loulou go on singing all the time . . . How do they do it? At last the hut appears, grey and dead in the moonlight; its key is a sort of weapon fifteen inches long. Soon we have the oil lamp burning, the stove roaring, our feet in thick felt slippers, and our knives busy peeling potatoes. Popol is a marvellous chef, and helped by Zizi, he

produces meals which are remembered months later. My shoulders, though freed from their burden, still ache from having carried the hard skis for so long.

Later in the evening we prepare the *glühwein*—spiced, warm red wine—which steams in the glasses. It is the moment I love most, when the men begin to sing our mountain tunes in chorus. Joy slowly brings peaceful lines to their faces. Some of the emotions we have felt are now expressed by the words of the song better than we can ever help to do it ourselves. These words describe the golden eyes of goats seen along the path, or the leaping torrent falling from the mountain and flowing through the wide meadows . . . I can still hear the sincere deep tone of Milo's voice singing:

"C'est toi, c'est toi, mon beau Valais,
Pays aimé à tout jamais . . ."

I was to remember him when I heard the voices of my Russian neighbours singing "Stenka Razine" on the shore of the Black Sea at Sotchi. They, also, knew how to express their love for the earth in the sound of a song.

In January we all spent a holiday in Le Tagui, a hut in the Savoyan Alps. In the morning light, from the stone terrace in front of the door, we could survey our wide domain. On our left, to the east, and soaring miles higher than us, the pyramidal summit of Mont-Blanc sat enthroned on the Döme du Goûté, flanked by the steep and rugged glacier de Bionassay. To the south, in front of us, the valley ended in the Col du Bonhomme. But the playgrounds which yielded to us the exhilaration of rapturous speed, were to our right, dominated by the calm Mont Joly. From this fair summit radiated all the ridges which were 'ours'. We admired these parallel hills . . . the regular Arête de St. Nicolas, the successive round mounds of the Arête du Milieu, and the last one on which we stood, called La Venaz. There, narrow at their birth where they sprang from the

long hump of the Joly, they spread down to the north-east, their lower slopes gradually dotted with fir-trees.

We decided to 'do' La Venaz before the crowds from the towns arrived. Skis waxed with the warm palm of the hand, and skins fastened, we were off, with an hour's climb in front of us.

Out of the chill of the last ravine where the water would remain solid for many weeks, we emerged in the sun, our hands stiff in our gloves, and a drop dangling at the nose. There stood Les Communailles, the highest farm in the valley, last and first to catch the rays of the sun. Theophile was leading his cows to the water-trough, and they walked in a mist rising from their own warmth. From there onwards, our parallel feet advanced in open snow-fields; goggles were put on; then successively gloves, scarf, wind-blouse and sweater were taken off. Our world was made of deep-blue sky, golden sun on the snow-slopes, and sparkling jewels at our feet—jewels real enough to startle the eye, and free for everybody to enjoy. The same softness of contours which I love to see on full, white-bosomed sails, blended the blue shadows of round and sunny bosses; in their freezing shade, the hoar-frost was heaped up in a layer of spangles which would fall aside with a metallic rustle in the wake of the skis.

This peaceful and radiant world was suddenly animated by the boys and their daring, mad movements. Straight down they darted from the top of the main ridge, where a tall iron cross was outlined against the infinite. They had climbed much faster than us, and now they were coming towards us. 'Taking it straight', opening their way in the powder-snow like a boat cutting the water, they left behind them sparkling jets like comets' tails.

We stopped to look at them, catching the thrill of the excitement they were going through. We held our breath, muttering unconsciously, "Hold it!" Sharply etched, crouching, and dodging the cold wind which robbed him of his breath, Loulou, the wiry boy, passed us; the look of his

piercing black eyes was concentrated far ahead, and, I can swear I saw it . . . his ears were couched down, streamlined like those of a racing animal.

None of them fell, which pleased us while disappointing us at the same time, so queer is human nature. They killed their speed with a tearing curve which savagely cut open the virgin layer of the snow. They were masters. By the time we had reached the top of our climb, having mounted the abrupt side of the corniche, the men had managed to overtake us. We stood near the iron cross, on the long backbone of the Joly, gazing into a new valley where the village of Mégève stood, 2,000 feet below us. This other side of the mountain was not steep at all and here the snow was usually spoilt by the sun. So we remained on our ridge which would eventually lead us back to the hut. Up there, the clean breeze prickled the inside of my nose; cold and crisp when reaching my lungs, this air called to life hundreds of new cells which throbbed in me joyfully.

Those were happy days. I loved my tomboy life, the antics we did in the snow, the burnt faces of everybody after two days of open air, the way we teased each other about our epoch-making falls on the mountain-side. That part of the world is also dear to me because of a moment I spent on the rounded top of La Venaz. I was last, obliged to scrape a sticky ski. Something made me raise my head. Alone in the sky, in unforgettable splendour, the summit of Mont-Blanc was looking at the sun. The mist had half-subsided, still blotting out the lower world. . . . Out of these dull-grey vapours rose this dazzling vision. The only other emerging part of the world was the round top on which I sat, next to a few small firs half-hidden under the snow.

In front of me stood something more than the mountain I knew by heart, made of familiar rocks, ice-walls and snow-fields. At that moment the isolated summit had a significance. Its eternal dignity was singing to me: "I am beauty!" But why had that grandiose peak which I knew well,

suddenly the power to move me? Was it only the wedding of the smoky mist with the sun's rays? Or could it be that the earth was showing the mood she was in? For the first time, though I had been often in our alpine world, I was moved to tears by beauty . . . that quality which can lie dormant in a blade of grass as well as in a mountain . . .

The same golden light was caressing the snow-files and the motionless waves of the mist. For a moment my individuality was merged in what I saw; I was bright snow and shapeless mist. Because, in peace and silence, my gaze had reached this lovable mountain, I had outgrown myself and become one with my vision.

That evening I had met mystery face to face.

After a week of living in the hut, we began to feel tough and reckless. . . . One evening after we had eaten our soup, we decided to ski over the mountain and down to Mégève so as to 'hit the place a crack'. Before starting we swallowed a large ration of warm wine, the better to combat the piercing cold. After that, we climbed without effort, experiencing the novelty and excitement one feels when doing things out of time.

The snow had a faint brightness of its own so that we did not go downhill like groping blind people. We became more and more daring as we went on. The snow was light and so 'easy' that I felt I could not fall. Bumps and holes were badly outlined, and I kept my knees supple all the time, ready to act instinctively as shock-absorbers. We knew where we could slide straight down in these open fields. And there I was like a swooping bird, freed from the ordinary laws of gravity. The cold drew tears from the corners of my eyes, while my trousers flapped behind my bent knees. I felt drunk much more from the speed and the cold than from our wine. This was the way to ski well. . . . Nothing could go wrong. I was even able to keep up with the boys. . . . But this thought had hardly taken shape when I was rudely awakened from my intoxicated state: I fell, drifting down the

hard and frozen slope into a well-known ravine which the boys had cleverly negotiated.

Even such violent contact with hard reality failed to make me sober. Life was fun anyhow and there were thousands of happy twinkling lights in the dark velvety dome over me. Feeling victorious after our fast run, we were singing loudly as we shot down between the grey houses of Mégève. We, the conquerors of the mountain, pushed open the door of a pub and took possession of the dancing-floor, waltzing madly round. And then we sat down in front of jugs of white wine.

Unlike the foreigners who were around us, we, from Geneva, felt at home in Mégève, not only because our town was so near, but because we had been the first to ski in this country. My parents had come here already twenty years ago, mother ski-ing with an ankle-long skirt, and father hidden under a balaclava helmet. Yes, we felt they were ours, these mountains we loved.

In spite of the sound of the accordion and the mountain-boots scratching the floor, my deep love of the water suddenly awoke. In one second my thoughts had jumped back to *Atalante*. I was describing her qualities, feeling my longing for her as strong as ever.

I was talking to a man of striking looks who was sitting at the table next to ours; tall, grey-haired, with steel-blue eyes in the middle of a sun-burnt, deeply-lined face. I would have guessed he was a sailor even if he had not worn a high-necked, navy-blue jersey. Detached and aloof, he seemed to be spectator of his own life and of the world in general. He was a retired admiral who had decided to live all the year round on board his yacht the *Insoumise*. Expert skier, he had come with his daughter Diana to spend a fortnight in the mountain. The *Insoumise* was a stout ketch which had been for a long time an Ostend pilot-boat; she was now waiting for him at Southwick. In the spring he would leave for the Pacific Islands, with the help of his son, two friends and one hand. He had been in the South Seas before, and he wanted to end his days there.

So that the Admiral could understand how thrilled I was by his story, I told him about our past cruises, our fitting out for New York, and the conversion of our pilot-boat into a yawl. *Atalante* and *Insoumise* were the same type of boat—though the latter was some hundred tons bigger—both steady at sea and built to ride hurricanes with the help of their strong canvas. In Ostend where he had bought her cheaply (the pilots did not believe in sail any more and had taken to motor-boats) the Admiral had spent eighteen months working on board, making a yacht out of her.

I can't remember who mentioned it first, but when we parted that night, it was understood that I would be ready to join the *Insoumise* at a moment's notice, in case I could be useful on board.

All of us who belonged to the mountain hut, climbed back towards La Croix. My legs felt like lead; a moist wind had sprung up, and the stars had disappeared. The boys were amusing, relating minutely their successes with some Parisian girls who had never before danced with such brawny men. I envied their gaiety while I felt torn between two worlds, belonging to neither completely; one made of snow mountains, the other one of seas and far away islands. Next day I tried to forget there existed sailing-boats which went to the other end of the world, in case this encounter at Mégève might be another of those thrilling but disappointing meetings without a morrow.

CHAPTER XVII

Shore Bound in the "Insoumise"

No. Things turned out better than I had hoped. Once more my thoughts and my future seemed to be taking me away from a land in which I did not know how to settle down. In March, I was already in the train en route for Newhaven, with my old sail-bag full of sea-clothes. The Admiral had written that his crew was ready, and he wanted to start for Gibraltar as soon as possible.

It was pleasing to think that soon I would belong once more to a sailing-boat; but I did not want to become excited about it. The eve of the grand departure had not yet come, though I believed the Admiral when he said that the climate of England and the narrow-mindedness of his compatriots were enough to send him away from home. He was going to sail southwards as soon as possible; and I was ready to go too, but not at all costs. My decision would depend on who else was on board, and how we would get on together: even if a paradise existed at the other end of the world, there was no point in reaching it on board a living hell. And the Admiral was just as careful as I was, saying that as far as Gibraltar it would be a trial cruise.

There he was, waving to me, tall, bareheaded, standing on the Newhaven wharf with lovely Diana. While all the grey landlubbers rushed into their dark train, we, the navy-blue people of the sea, motored along the coast to Southwick.

Most of the men we saw when we passed quickly through Brighton had their lives clearly outlined within the walls of their work and their families. Once again I felt on the threshold of the unknown.

Insoumise was tied to a wooden landing-stage in the

Southwick channel; from there the land was hidden by low, sad-looking houses built on top of the bank. She was the perfect ship for a high-sea cruise, beamy with strong bulwarks, thick shrouds lashed on to dead-eyes, a deck-house built on top of the companion, a long bowsprit and a square-yard aloft on the mainmast. She was nearly ready to sail except for the provisions to be taken on board, and some varnishing which could only be done in fine weather.

But it was going to rain for days, even for weeks, during which I only went ashore twice. In the *Insoumise* I climbed down into the den of a sea-king and from there the land faded slowly into nothingness. The spacious saloon was lovely to look at, specially when a ray of sun fell through the skylight to brighten the golden frames of the old sea-scapes. Tall Polynesian devil-devils made of carved wood, seemed tired of eating for ever the same decorative fish. Plastered and tattooed skulls of deceased South Sea islanders were stored in coffin-like chests, their bleached shocks of hair caught in arrows which had once killed fishes; their dead eyes stuffed either with cowries or with mother-of-pearl imitating the cornea. Sea-shell necklaces, tapa cloth, strange matting-work and pareos lay there, also exiled from the Antipodes. Simply by looking at the evocative sea-chests covered with brass nails, the imagination would follow in the wake of Captain Kidd and his lawless buccaneers. Twice a week the Admiral's daughter polished the shiny wooden writing-desk, the old dining-table and the Chippendale chairs. The floor linoleum became dark green when rubbed after a new waxing. On the walls, the frigates of the oil-paintings fired their salvoes across angry seas.

In the armchair near the stove, I spent many hours listening to stories, looking at photographs or reading books about the seven seas.

After breakfast the dynamo would be started, to reload the battery for our electric light. Then the Admiral would sit down, smoke endless Gold Flakes, answer my questions or relate some experiences. During the war he had

commanded a destroyer flotilla in Australia. Free to sail wherever he wanted, he had gone inside the Great Barrier Reef, and along the coast of islands previously owned by Germany. There in New Guinea he had led a thrilling expedition up an unknown river, following the tracks of an escaping enemy who had flown the German flag on his fortified camp in the middle of the jungle.

Another time, wanting to do some inland exploration, he had started with natives who were terrified by the wild men of the interior. To persuade these savages to let him pass, he had taken masses of red scarves and hatchets as presents. I do not remember what result was achieved; but the Admiral went as naked as his natives, and the colour of his skin had become as dark as theirs.

When the conversation dealt with this part of the world, I had not much to say, except what Gerbault had written to me about his beloved Islanders. But when the talk turned to the Mediterranean, I also could spin a few 'yarns'. Once we had been arrested by the Italians in the Maddalena archipelago because we had sailed through a forbidden area. . . . Then the 'bora' had broken our gaff south of the Adriatic. . . . We had towed our boat along the Corinth canal because we had no money for the tug. . . . Sir Roger Keyes, Commander-in-Chief of the Meditteranean fleet, had inspected our *Bonita* at Argostoli and because of his heated discussion with Miette, the flagship H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* had gone under way ten minutes late. . . . As for Flag-Lieutenant King-Hall, he had nearly swung at the yard-arm because he had not succeeded in bringing us back for dinner on board the *Queen Elizabeth* the day before!

Every morning Diana went ashore to do the catering, while Olive, a friend of the family, prepared lunch in the galley. The other inmates of the *Insoumise* were Michael, the Admiral's son, a strong lad of eighteen, and Mann the bo's'un, a small chap with a grey moustache, always busy like a mouse. The kind of Bohemian atmosphere we breathed on board made life quite pleasant. But abroad

the weather was filthy, rains lashed the deckhouse and a perpetual south-westerly gale howled and wailed in the rigging. Also, I could not make out what was going to happen to our yacht. At first, everything had looked all right, the list of the things to get had been dealt with and we had filled the bunkers with coal for the stove.

Then something happened to the friend of the Admiral who was to complete our crew of five, (counting myself one of the members). He could have been replaced, no doubt, but Michael failed us too. He had gone to see his grandmother, and some kind of family problem had arisen preventing his return. Michael had worked in the merchant navy and he had just come back from Australia. He was worth two men, and we could not do without him. *Insoumise*, it was decided, would be sailed over to Trouville (where the climate and the price of living were more amiable than in England), and she would stay there until a solution could be found.

All this sounded depressing, and once I had helped to scrape, paint and splice everything on the *Insoumise* I decided to leave her. My old barge-yacht the *Volunteer* was at sea already, starting on a cruise through the Dutch canals. I had been drowned under an avalanche of telegrams from the Colonel who needed me as interpreter: he had secured a marvellously cheap French crew with which he could not exchange a word. . . . So far I had discarded the *Volunteer* from my plans: I had learnt all I could from her, she was sometimes too exacting for my nerves, and I had decided to look for something better. But she would be all right for a short time while the *Insoumise* was getting ready. . . . And my terms, higher than two years ago, had just been accepted by the Colonel. I can say at once that I deserved every penny I earned on that journey.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Low Countries

"If thou wilt see much in little, travel the Low Countries."
—Thomas Fuller

It was fun to see once more the engraved lettering '*Volunteer* —Harwich' on the transom of the old barge. Her roof-tops were painted white, she had a new bowsprit and a new top-sail: such were the changes I noticed at once. True to himself, the Colonel wanted to leave as soon as possible, so that I had no time to unpack: we were already in the lock, asking for the swing-bridge to be opened. We were leaving Calais eastward bound.

But things were not going to work out easily during the *Volunteer's* most original cruise; and our first manœuvre was just an example of what can happen on a barge. We were not yet beyond the Gare Maritime, when Baranger, our small captain, got alarmed: the barge was making hardly any headway, and it was clear that she would never overcome the current between the breakwaters. He decided to go back, but in spite of the noisy engine, we lost way completely, and came slowly alongside the breakwater. Baranger was already throwing a line on shore, when the Colonel ordered him to hoist the topsail and make for the high sea. . . . But we only drifted along helplessly, and we had to let go the anchor. We sent for a specialist from the Garage de Londres. Baranger ran to the harbour-master to find out on what sort of ground our heavy bulk would rest at low-tide. . . .

In the dinghy, Le Roux, our Jack of all trades, naked to the waist, was working at our propeller, jammed by a tightly-wound rope; now and then the heaving sea passed

over his head, while his knife tried to cut the guilty warp. The white skin of his back was stained by the black-lead paint spread on our hull. In the meantime Yves, our bo's'un, had streamed the kedge anchor and heaved in at the windlass, so that we were in the middle of the *bassin.* Spitting and shivering, Le Roux carried on with his diving exercises, but all in vain. The shaft might have been freed if we could have reversed the engine, but even by hand one could not move the propeller. Under spanker and topsail we made for a beach where at low water everything was put in order.

For the first time the *Volunteer* was handled by a crew of four men who—I had just seen it—were quite capable. It would be marvellous to sail in such circumstances, I thought then, happily unable to foresee how many grey hairs this same crew would cause me.

The same evening we were off, leaving the Ridens Bank to starboard. The breeze was increasing every minute, and later, rollers breaking threateningly on low banks were seen to the north. Dunkerque was sighted. As I turned in, the wireless-set was thrown on the floor, so heavily were we lurching! With so many men on board, I granted myself a full night's sleep.

Coming on deck early in the morning, the Colonel found the helmsman making straight for the estuary of the Scheldt, whereas we were bound for the Maas and Rotterdam. . . . The Owner inferred at once that Baranger, unable to read a map, had given a false course, muddling the two estuaries. In reality, the squall had been blowing so viciously that the captain had decided to make for the shelter of Flushing, conspicuous by its huge flat crane. But the daylight had risen on a calmer sea turned into soapy-green muck; so we carried on, past the island of Walcheren, identifying the Westkapelle lighthouse among cream-coloured sand-dunes. Many Dutch botters, tubbish vessels with lee-boards, were fishing around us; their skippers, quite stiff in their aprons of thick oilskins, saluted us with a slow gesture. As one sails

off different coasts, it is fascinating to notice how every kind of fishing has created a type of boat adapted to the changing shore-grounds. But now these characteristic craft, result of centuries of experience, are dwindling away since big trawlers can so easily sift the seawaters of their slippery denizens.

While our barge rolled moanfully in a ground-swell, I went on deck to eat the *côtelette* cooked by Le Roux. By then, the breeze having died, the engine was pushing us along on a beige-coloured sea, and towards a country none of us knew. We were going to pick up the Colonel's wife and a friend at Rotterdam; they were expected to arrive there quickly and comfortably by packet-boat. They both wanted to visit one of Holland's foremost tulip merchants in order to buy bulbs. The new land greeted us with the far-away wings of a windmill cowering from the cold air behind shore-dunes edged with green.

Later in the day we seemed to be hardly moving, though we were trying to avoid the main current created by the Maas. But after four hours' work it looked as if we had rather fallen backwards on the Maas lightship; boats of all sorts were scouring around and it was a dreadful feeling to have a helm which barely answered a turn of the wheel. We searched the seas for a pilot, until we realised that he also would have been helpless, since, to crown all, a strong head-wind had sprung up. The sails were loosened and set; we decided to tack towards Scheveningen, hoping that from there the Hook of Holland would be easier to approach.

Night came for the second time since we had said good-bye to the French shore; and still we kept tacking while the ominous sounds of the weather seemed to be increasing. Baranger himself admitted that he was tired, and my eyes smarted from spying out the lights of all the surrounding vessels. With following wind and tide, next morning found us progressing up the canal at last, and refusing a tug's offer which claimed £10 to tow us to Rotterdam. Activity and efficiency were noticeable on the river: dredgers rattled

painfully, men took soundings, old buoys were being replaced by bright striped new ones in spite of the dense traffic. On top of the north dam, quite near us, a train was overtaking us; at that moment our engine stopped with a metallic snapping sound. The water circulation was faulty, the engine had become over-heated, causing the inlet to get choked. Peacefully and slowly we sailed onwards while a harbour official boarded us to get a cigar and a glass of brandy from the Colonel; anyhow I could not find out what else he wanted from us. The motor started again after it had cooled down. Steamers were overtaking us in the narrowing thoroughfare. Tac . . . the engine had died again, accompanied by the little noise which was becoming familiar to our ears; and Le Roux accused our owner of fiddling about . . . because from the saloon, he had just seen him standing in the engine-room!

This time the men sweated in vain trying to start the fly-wheel; the engine was not to be brought to life again, and everybody got angry. I was alone on deck most of the time, worried because our sails were hardly drawing, a dangerous state of affairs amongst so many ships. A tug agreed to take charge of us for £4. And so at last I could afford to look at the scenery, at the cows in the middle of green meadows, at groups of trees sheltering cottages. . . . The houses and the thick foliage of Maasluis were charmingly clustered at the end of a glistening canal.

Soon the land turned grey, covered with warehouses, cranes, derricks, elevators, and storerooms bearing the names of famous shipping-lines. Processions of lighters blocked the highway, tugs and launches darted about dangerously, emitting blasts to indicate their intentions. The river was never flat because backwaters and washes were constantly running towards each other. Over the landscape hung the sooty smoke which conceals from the sky all important industrial centres. And there, like a jewel shining in a dull setting, the spick-and-span Yacht Club sparkled, displaying varnished hulls, bright brass-work on

the Dutch bojer-yachts, glossy white-enamelled deck-tops, smooth spars, light dinghies, and snow-white halliards. . . . It seemed incredible that these *de luxe* boats had been sailing the same element as all the grey busy-bodies scurrying around us!

There in Veerhaven, *Volunteer* found herself in a peaceful basin surrounded by trees, overlooked by a church steeple: a nook in complete contrast to the bewildering canal whose speed, noise, variety of craft and crowding had stunned me. Across the river, in the south, a series of huge cranes barred the sky. Quite near, a colossal ferry-boat crossed the river so fast that I wondered how it did not bump into many a hull on the way. And there—how I smiled with surprise! —a bright red spot caught my eye, and it was the Swiss flag with its white cross fluttering brilliantly at the stern of a powerful sea-tug.

Mr. Reens, the ship chandler, had been on the look-out, and he came on board as soon as we were tied alongside to tell us at which hotel we could find Mrs. Bennett and her friend. The same evening they were on board. The 'missus' was rather awe-inspiring until you caught sight of her sharp and witty eye behind a pince-nez. She would purse her lips in a decided way. To see how she treated her spouse was too funny for words, as she made him look like the naughty school-boy who makes faces behind his master's back. An incident was created daily when the port decanter went round: Jack, who loved it, was not allowed to touch it, as it was pure poison for any diabetic. The daily heroism of not tilting the bottle into his glass was, I am convinced, more difficult to him than jumping through fire. That is why he succumbed many a time. Happily brandy was said to be less bad for him, so he drank it as a substitute. . . . Poor Jack, he was to suffer much in undergoing an insulin cure later! Miette asked him once what one felt like when suffering from his illness, and the answer so typical of him was: "It makes me fall in love with every girl I see!"

In reality he was often seedy and unable to master his

temper. At these moments it was best to wait till the squall passed and not take his words too seriously. This attitude was difficult to maintain, I must admit, when for example, he accused me of being less helpful than before, and of taking sides with the crew. . . . I was doing nothing of the sort, but during the whole journey, acting as a buffer, I adopted the policy of expounding to each adversary the point of view of his opponent. And it is always difficult to reach mutual understanding along these lines.

On the thirtieth of April, Princess Juliana's birthday, all the boats were brightly dressed, while music floated in the air. A Dutch steward-cook came on board, replacing Le Roux, who became deck-hand; and we decided to land him next time we touched France. Our fourth Frenchman was Danet, who seldom spoke. A mechanic fitted a new water inlet five millimetres wider than the old one. Joints were checked and the lubrication pump cleaned, so that we all thought the engine would behave like an angel, as nothing could be wrong with it.

The pilot came. The Colonel battled with tradesmen bringing petrol, paraffin, milk, fish, paint, blankets, wines, pots and pans . . . all of them, in harsh English, clamouring for their receipts and their money. We were sent in various directions to check up everything. I emphasised to Baranger the funny side of it all, but he grumbled just the same: he could not plan his day's work, never knowing what was going to take place, and being interrupted all the time. Nothing could be ship-shape on this blooming barge, where a new coat of paint was the universal remedy for all defects. Had he known, he would not have signed on, but the Yacht Club de France had advised him to take command of the yacht *Volunteer*, which was supposed to race in the Havre regattas ! ! ! Baranger did not know where to quarter the steward, in what to clothe him or how many days it would be before putting into a big harbour again. I told him that was just the charm of our life, the Bohemian style of a strolling house-boat. . . .

Baranger was a proud little Frenchman, *monté sur ses ergots comme un coq gaulois*, with a close-cropped black moustache, and he could not see eye to eye with me. Now and then during our cruise I collected some of his reminiscences. Aged eighteen he had deserted his ship at Seattle after learning of his mother's death. After he had managed to get a kind of *laisser-passer*, he began to lead a wild life, journeying with a horse, prospecting on the way, living under a tent. When all his money was spent, he managed to reach San Francisco, where his consul put him in the windjammer *General Lebodof*. On board, he went through the *conseil de révision* which executes the French Board of Trade regulations; and then he had to serve out his sentence for a long time in the French Navy. He sailed out again, and once more deserted at San Francisco, this time to join a whaler. He made a lot of money, married, divorced after six months, worked as a pilot at Le Havre, and bought a sixty-ton tunny boat. Then a dreadful thing happened: in a gale, seventy-five miles S.W. of Penmarch, his mast went, rotten at the step, and the ship sank. He saved his men, who were caught in the sails; and in the rowing-boat they spent nine hours completely drenched by the seas which broke over them in spite of the oil-bag hung overboard. His boat had not been insured, and he only got a small reward of 5,000 francs with the *médaille d'or de sauvetage* for the rescue of his crew. After that, he became director of a creosote-oil company until the firm went bankrupt. And then, last but not least, he found himself in this blooming barge, an experiment which was crowning all his bad luck, he said.

During our last day at Rotterdam I was sent to cash a cheque in the office of a nice man, who gallantly offered his services in case I wanted to explore the 'dancings' of the town! By the time I was back at the Yacht Club, the barge had vanished from the horizon. What was I to do? I could not swim after her, or hire a launch, not knowing which way our pilot had taken her! . . .

Looking round for help I noticed a well-dressed young

man with a rosy complexion, full lips, and curly hair, obviously a member of the Club. He listened to my story, and took me to somebody belonging to the Smith Co. which seemed to own half the tugs in sight. We jumped in the tug waiting in front of the club—which had originally been going to the launching of a 4,000-ton ship—and I was raced up river. Our crew lowered masts and funnel at the last hundredth of a second when passing under a bridge, brushing past huge black hulls or cutting in front of grumpy tugs towing half-a-mile of nearly submerged lighters, helpless as the corpses of overfed giants.

At last we overtook the *Volunteer*. She was beyond a bridge, which opened for fifteen minutes only at the beginning of the afternoon; this fact had forced the pilot to leave without waiting for me. I jumped on board and my tug was gone in no time.

At first, for nearly four hours, another tug pulled us up, branching off into the Yissel river. There, on both shores, our wash lapped fat meadows and caused shy reeds to whisper to each other. Goats licked the lower stones of the dike. The air gave you a cold pinch as it struck your cheek.

Gay flags fluttered near the water. In the middle of the green and flat land, two gigantic windmills stood with their sails motionless. The immensity of the sky was here more obvious than at sea, apparently enhanced by the lowness of a land reduced to a mere strip. The peaceful, bulging clouds, with their fringes lit by a hidden sun, looked like those once painted by Dutch masters. As always when there is water near me, I felt quietly thrilled.

We were nearing a town called Gouda and its imposing church played hide-and-seek behind the trees which lined the dam. We made fast alongside bright-coloured barges, our tug left us and we prepared to go through the lock, standing by with our fenders made of old motor-tyres. Impatient, the Colonel gave two extra guilders to the lock-keeper in the hope of getting us through before our turn . . . but nothing happened for a very long time. At last, at

nine o'clock, we decided to dine. No food had been bought for the crew, it appeared, so the pilot and the cook were hurriedly sent ashore to buy some. By ten o'clock these hardy Dutchmen hadn't come back. Deciding they had gone on the spree, I gave the remains of our dinner to the grumbling French crew, by then sick of waiting. (How I missed old Revell, who had never been taken unawares by the barges' vagaries. . . . As soon as we touched land, wherever it might have been, he used to jump ashore, coming back in no time with milk, fish, butter and fruit.) Baranger was tiresome, saying he could not eat out of time like that, it was the worst boat he had signed on during the last eighteen years he had been on yachts, etc. There was a mutiny brewing; I was about to say that from now on I would control things . . . when the Colonel appeared!

The noise of the argument had caught his attention, and now he was sharply ordering everybody: "Go to bed now. Be ready to stand by to-morrow at six." And he began to wind up the alarm clock!

A nervous thunderstorm was ready to burst in our overcrowded galley. Facing the Colonel, I summoned to my help all the meagre diplomacy I possessed, explaining that the men had been on duty day and night since we had left Calais, except for a short night at Rotterdam; that they went to sleep late, as they could only lie down on the galley tables after everything had been cleared away from our late dinners; that to-morrow was a Sunday, which meant a lot to working people. I even called him a slave-driver from the backwoods of darkest Africa. . . . That made him laugh boisterously, "the hurly-burly was done, the battle lost and won. . . ." The alarm-clock was advanced to seven-thirty, and a bottle of white wine was offered to brighten up the crew's weekly repose.

I left Le Roux cooking eggs and Yves opening a tin of sardines.

The morning of Sunday the first of May was most peaceful. We left the crowded Yissel and slid along another waterway.

Cattle covered with blankets stared absent-mindedly at the barge, which looked more clumsy than ever in these dainty surroundings. As we passed through swing-bridges I had to put twenty cents in the dirty little wooden sabot that dangled at the end of a fishing-rod. Folk decked out in their Sunday best, rushed outside to examine us; every house had a washing-place on the canal, which, according to our pilot, smelt far from nice in summer-time. Water rippled at the end of every garden, while miniature gardens on the barges themselves, sailed by on the lively water.

One breakdown gave me time to jump ashore after we had bumped against a grassy bank, and with wild yellow flowers I made my first and last bunch of the year. Underwater the current brushed all the obedient yellow weeds in the same direction. On deck the crew were painting the cabin-tops; to please the Colonel they had put on the red stocking caps he had given them. Down below the so-called specialist from Rotterdam hammered at the engine, and then pretended that we were short of petrol. He was wrong; so we began to believe the cook who had warned us that his compatriot was no good. Poor Colonel, he was unlucky! He had obviously engaged all this extra personnel to offer his wife a lovely cruise without a hitch. . . . The 'missus's' time was measured, every breakdown was dreaded, nobody but the Colonel could control the repair work on the engine, and at the same time he had to obey his wife who wanted him to do some sight-seeing. . . . We were bound to experience some tense moments!

As we were leaving Harlem, we were overtaken by a man yelling something at us from the bank. The pilot translated: we were supposed to have stolen dozens of petrol and paraffin tins from the merchant. Our famous 'specialist,' instead of emptying these gallons in our tanks, had preferred to line the bulkheads of his engine-room with them!

CHAPTER XIX

RUBBER-NECKING

BEFORE reaching Harlem, we had seen our first tulip fields, an unforgettable sight. Symmetrical squares of dazzling red, white, blue, yellow and purple could be seen from the rigging: it looked like a sample sheet of an enamel-paint merchant. By the edge of the water the cut heads of the flowers were piled up in mounds.

In Harlem I had a boy friend: three years ago we had sailed side by side, each of us representing our countries during the single-handed regattas of the Olympic Games. Over the telephone I heard that Tony Hin was in America, but his brothers and sisters would come and fetch me. They were cheerful and happy-looking. In their wealthy house I met Tony's mother, all dressed in black satin, in a room panelled with a shiny wood, where a tiny oil-lamp burnt at the foot of a crucifix. To Mr. Hin I explained all the *Volunteer's* miseries:

"Was it possible to prevent the 'specialist' from demolishing the engine, the pilot from charging us too much at every bridge we passed, the cook from drinking the Colonel's whisky, from doubling the bill for his catering, and from eating with his fingers?" Small Mr. Hin, with his pugnacious eyebrows and his pink cheeks, was just as lively as in 1924, when he used to run along the shore giving last advice to Tony. He decided to spend one day with us so as to see how things were going.

In Groenendaal we visited the flowers of the well-known horticulturist, Roze. At the gate we were asked if we had come there from another garden. It appears that one can carry a contagious illness to the flowers; and some susceptible

bulbs were kept well isolated behind asbestos bulwarks. Heads were cut in order to fortify the bulbs. Tulips are most happy in a sandy soil reclaimed from the sea, well manured, and in which for the first year either potatoes or green peas have been planted. Tulips were introduced to Europe from Asia in the sixteenth century; and I was myself, later on, to see them growing wild, on the high plateaux of Baluchistan, like tiny, pathetic, motionless yellow flames in the middle of the gravel waste.

But here in Holland, what a credit to culture they represented, with their fleshy petals, their shiny arteries, their matt, thick, powdery leaves of green rubber. Shall I try to say how I felt in that enchanted garden? Not only was the quality of the tulips unique, but also the quantity, the armies of them standing to attention with stern demeanour; and shyly, with their graceful curves, the leaves trying to palliate this impression. The compact presence of innumerable flowers sent out such radiations that I was filled with their vibrating life. The 'Prince of Austria' flower-bed was a red sea, so red, so intense that you found yourself in a bath of joy, wishing you could shout, accompanied by resounding cymbals while announcing a great victory. Yes, through the eye one's interior mood can be completely altered.

Coming upon a bed of dense blue hyacinths I found myself taking a deep breath! it was as if I had opened a window and looked out into the clear sky. And this time I fell a prey to my sense of smell. All the sweetness of the earth invaded me so powerfully, and the fragrance was so overwhelming, that it might have sickened me had I not walked away.

Rare and dazzling were the orange tulips: a deep, living mass of red gold which made my eyes blink as if I had looked into a brazier. . . . Yes, they were like tongues of fire struck motionless by some strange power. While the sun played on it, this orange was more full of splendour than the sumptuous purple praised by the poets. Such a colour had been worthy of choice by the Emperors of the Middle

Kingdom. I imagined the scene. The Son of Heaven thanking the radiant sun, kneeling alone on the round white marble platform, with his orange robe flowing down the steps under a pure sky of deep blue.

Harlem had other joys to offer us: the miracle of the Franz Hals portraits, bursting with life in the silence of a bright museum. . . . And the queer mediæval atmosphere of St. Bovan, the cathedral, with low houses built against its walls. Looking up at the lofty pillars inside, I stumbled against old tombstones set unevenly in the floor. From the roof hung three picturesque little galleys, given to the cathedral by William of Orange to commemorate the fifth Crusade. It was fitting that there should be ships in the church of a country which owed so much to its conquest of the sea.

Soon we were back in our "galley", lunching peacefully with Mr. and Mrs. Hin, while we moved slowly towards Amsterdam, passing through Harlem's many bridges. Suddenly we felt a shock, and the barge stopped. A shroud had caught in a swinging bridge and our cross-tree had bent; fortunately the damage was no worse. It was nobody's fault: unless we could go full speed ahead it was sometimes impossible to prevent the barge, with her length of eighty feet, from progressing slightly sideways and bumping into the many piles along the Dutch waterways. We had to sail the whole time with our tyre-fenders flung overboard. Perhaps a better way would have been to go fast, frightening the bridge-keepers so that they stopped the traffic as soon as they saw us coming, instead of allowing six more carts to cross the bridge. Probably the calm Dutchmen, turning their bridge windlasses day after day, liked to take a risk now and then in order to have some fun. But why did they have to wait till the poor *Volunteer* came along? Couldn't they see that her engine pipes were half choked with weeds!

One asked for the bridges to be opened by three blasts

of the horn.* We had nothing but a silly little trumpet, which we sounded miles in advance, so nervous were we of those dreadful bridges. The keepers never seemed to budge an inch, and thinking they had not heard us, we would proceed, blowing more and more frantically, until everybody ashore thought that we had gone mad. . . . Once a railway bridge opened for us. As we crept slowly onwards, it was terrifying to imagine an express train which had missed the signal flying straight on into the air before crashing on top of the *Volunteer*.

I am afraid we were a disgrace to our kind. True bargees are remarkable for their economy of movement. Time and again, in Holland or in France, I have watched them remain with folded arms for hours, pushing the long tiller with a fat behind.

The lock at Spaarndam offered us a green pause in the shade of old trees. Mr. Hin decided to stay a little longer with us. He had just discovered that our pilot was making us pay lock dues for a boat a hundred tons larger than the *Volunteer*, supposing that we would not verify the matter in the tariff book.

We were planing swiftly along the surface of a canal above the level of the fields, when our 'specialist' made us stop: the engine was red hot, and the water was not circulating. The bilge pump had also burst, and a connecting joint was burnt, simply because, as the Colonel discovered, the sea-cock had not been opened. . . . Well, well, well!

I enjoyed the silence on deck, all sails set. Then the whispering breeze died out and we softly ran aground among the yielding reeds.

A tug which had overtaken us came to the rescue. Once more we moved ahead; and if the map had not told us that we were nearing the Nordzee canal, we should have believed in miracles. A huge white and black liner was weirdly gliding across country on top of a green meadow!

At nightfall Mr. Hin jumped ashore, having decided to

* In the language of the waterways one blast of the horn means "I go to starboard"; two blasts, "I go to port".

walk home that evening. His good wishes sounded after us, and once more he invited me to stay on his yacht during the next Olympic Games to be held in Holland.

They were to take place next year. Where would I be in a year's time? In another continent with the *Insoumise*, or still groping blindly and alone, towards I did not know what? Nobody needed me, I did not feel driven towards any particular activity, so what was I to do? Would that need or that urge ever take hold of me? Was 'wait and see' really the only answer I could find?'

When we were at Rotterdam I had felt an intense longing for solitude, and that evening I had sneaked ashore and walked slowly along the Boomjes quay, planted with round little trees. Exhausted, I had let myself flop on a friendly tarpaulin. I was unknown, in a strange land, so I relaxed, and losing all self-consciousness, indulged in a memorable cry. This life of mine, to what purpose had it been lived, free as it was from any tie? Did some constructive ideal exist which I could serve wholeheartedly? I longed to work with people who shared a single aim, and to feel the human warmth round me which created brave ideas, as well as the courage to realise them.

Wait and see. . . .

Here again I am dealing with myself. I should explain that I am really writing these pages to find out what I thought fifteen years ago. My log-book never mentions a conversation or a thought. The plain remark 'fine sailing' stands for the most exhilarating day of a long cruise. I avoided any sort of lyrical expression—distrustful of words, afraid that they would sound hollow. My diaries are filled with such practical hints as:

> "Leaving Le Havre. Keep well into the N.W. fairway. To port there is the Banc de l'Eclat; to starboard, shifting banks which begin as soon as shingle gives way to sand on the shore. Breakers of Le Becquier before Cap de la Hève . . ."

or elsewhere:

> "Hurrah! I found the way to clean old oilskins. Boil them in water with ammonia and soda; when dry, put on coats of turps. . . ."

My mind is not powerful enough to remember clearly what I felt so long ago. The best way to meet once again those ideas which were mine is to try to create the old surroundings, hoping that they will bring back the old state of mind. Have you ever stalked your past impressions? When I look for roe-deer, kulan or wild sheep, my imagination creates their rectangular shape on the blurred landscape, until this mind's image vanishes when the living animal is seen. In the same way I have to imagine my old thoughts and moods and methods of reasoning, trying to recognise which ones ring true, which ones fit in with the facts. Of course there is a temptation to bluff: it would be easy for me now to unearth reasons for my past impulses which would make me appear a purposeful and sympathetic figure. But to be of value, my search must be honest. To discover a reason for my heedlessness, I explored every possible motive, facing the very bottom of the scale, where shameful weaknesses lay crouching. For a short time I even strengthened my heart for the shock of discovering that cowardice or idleness had influenced me. But no. Though I am ready to go a long way to avoid trouble, I enjoy battling with difficulties, and though fond of loafing I like the feeling of peace that is brought by work accomplished. Then what prevented my doing something useful? Was I too ambitious, thirsting for more than a survival into the lives of my children . . . for something bigger and limitless?

My attempts to recreate the past can only be fragmentary. My companions may feel that I am not giving them their due, but I am not writing a novel in which every character needs special attention. I am just assembling what I remember. And by now I fear that I must have become

tiresome to my reader, doing everything, as it seems, and criticising my shipmates the rest of the time. But notes entered in my log-book only deal with my watches; and by transcribing them it will appear that I was ever present. I feel that later in my tale, when surrounded by good sailors, I shall look less efficient.

Waking up in Amsterdam harbour, impatient to see the view, I jumped on deck in my dressing-gown. One of the constant joys of sailing is to find oneself at dawn in a new anchorage. Last night the *Volunteer* had followed a very wide canal, and we had not seen much of the town except the lit-up roofs of the station hall. In the morning, as soon as we had picked up a mooring near the Yacht Club, a swarm of ship-chandlers boarded us. Kashmiris have much the same way of attacking your house-boat in Srinagar, offering you the products of India. . . .

After rowing across the roadstead, I found myself gliding down smelly canals which reminded me of Venice. How gay a town can be when every street is a water-way reflecting the light of the sky, the trembling shade of an old poplar, the elegant shape of ancient roofs. How unforeseen are the perspectives you discover and how pleasant the abandoned canal, lined with watercress, in which a red brick church is mirrored! In striking contrast to such remote backwaters is the imposing Nordzee canal, where every possible type of boat seems to move.

The processions of cyclists passing over the narrow town bridge were continuous. I noticed that even young boys smoked cigarettes, and at eighteen most of them seemed to have adopted the cigar. My eyes never tired of following the barges edged with bright colours. And it sounded like a fairy-tale to hear that the Queen lived in a palace built on 13,000 piles!

Next day a jolly little water-taxi came alongside the *Volunteer* to offer its services, which were too expensive, according to the Colonel. So we all sat in the motor-dinghy

and pushed off, with the Specialist in charge. We drifted gently along, but we never started. Some ball-bearings had mysteriously broken. . . . After that the Specialist asked for his pay. He had to show his arm to a doctor; he had worked so hard that it was quite swollen. The Colonel gave him his thirty guilders. Next day the ship-chandler came to say that the Specialist was going to a surgeon, and wanted more money. At this the Colonel burst into a red rage: "What? The man has been with us just four days. I gave him a pound sterling in Rotterdam and now he wants some more. He'll jolly well have to do without it!"

Excited by this incident, the Colonel was like a bull let loose, and went for the crew before I could stop him. Why had not the men finished their supper at seven o'clock as they should have done? And now that Le Roux was a deck-hand, why hadn't he given his steward's outfit to Danet? It just happened that Danet, who was usually a good sort, had a grumble that day. He needed all his courage to speak, but: ". . . he had never agreed to run about with jugs of hot water at eleven o'clock every night. That would be quite a nice work for a demoiselle like Miss Ella. Na! . . . And he could not put on Le Roux's steward's outfit because Le Roux had never had one yet. It was not to be found in the ship's cupboards, and no doubt the last steward had walked away with it . . . And yes, he was forgetting to say that he also would quit at Le Havre as soon as the barge was back!"

I did not have to translate much. The boss got the gist of it all right. Dear Colonel! I could not help smiling when I saw him in this hornets' nest, and I admired the grace with which he backed out of it, offering his apologies to Danet, by then quite abashed at his outburst. It was decided that I should write to the agent in Le Havre, asking for a French cook, and happily for everybody the Colonel and his guests soon cleared out, as they were dining in evening dress in one of the big yachts alongside.

In Amsterdam we enjoyed looking at old masters in the Museums. It gave one quite a shock to see the life vibrating in the originals of pictures hitherto known only as copies. One ought to look at paintings alone; but in spite of the Colonel's disturbing appreciations, I was so afraid of losing him in the innumerable rooms of the Rijksmuseum that I stuck to him like a leech.

Pictures appeal to me more than diamonds, but all the same I watched with interest the way in which precious stones are cut. We climbed to the fourth storey of a house so old that one felt nothing had changed for centuries. First we saw the stones being cut in two by a thin copper disc, the kind of instrument dentists use to cut or separate teeth. The edge of the disc was smeared with diamond dust mixed with oil. To divide an average stone, the disc hisses round for a whole week. Then comes the second operation, when thirty or fifty facets have to be cut. It is done by two diamonds, one of which is held motionless, rubbing against the other. Finally, the polishing takes place. Kept in continual motion, the surface of a big disc, covered with diamond dust, rubs against three stones, all of which it polishes at the same time. Patience, skill, precision and fabulous wealth live modestly within a stone's throw of the Jewish quarter, dense, dirty, depressing.

Before we left Amsterdam I went to the Museum to call once again on those great magicians, El Greco and Rembrandt, and to take leave of three newly-made friends. I communed with each in turn, moved by Filippino Lippi's distinguished depth of colour, the vaporous charm of Cranach the Elder, the green and gold lusciousness of Van Mieris.

CHAPTER XX

Collisions, and a "Rescue"

Ready to retrace her course to Rotterdam, the barge-yacht *Volunteer*, R.D.Y.C., said good-bye to Amsterdam, chief city of the Netherlands. It was six o'clock in the morning and everything was bathed in a pearly mist. The two ladies had returned to England, and I hoped that life on board might run more smoothly.

We neared a huge railway bridge, and a single warning from our ridiculous trumpet was sufficient to set its southern span in motion, an imposing and free performance. Railway bridges alone claim no money from the navigator.

So strong a breeze was blowing from abaft that we stopped the auxiliary, and began to feel grand, Baranger included. We turned out of the wide Nordzee Canal at right angles, and sailed south. We did it in impressive style by gybing, everybody busy at his given post. We flew along, and Holland seemed considerably smaller now that there were no breakdowns. In five hours we had reached Harlem, where a good electrician recommended by Mr. Hin quickly changed the burnt wiring of our dynamo, and soon we were under way again.

High up, where there were no banks to interfere with their hissing game, the squalls chased each other, filling our large topsail, and sending us skimming along. We hardly had time to look at the clean, pretty villas, or the strongly-built, handsome girls rowing in canoes, so busy were we brailing up everything before each swing-bridge. They opened without delay. It seemed as if we had learned the right technique at last, but it only meant, I am convinced, that we had lived in agreement the whole day. There had

been no mistrustful comments, no hurried manœuvres, and the barge had felt happy.

It was but the lull before the storm.

Next day the same north-easterly breeze, towards which every windmill was set, blew mightily. We flew from bend to bend, the swirls in our wake drawing an ephemeral line across a blue inland sea. Just after a curve, as we glided once again in narrow waters, we suddenly saw the Woudbrugge double drawbridge. With our sails brailed up in no time, and the foresails down on deck, we had soon lost just enough way, but because of the wind I could not keep the barge quite parallel with the piles of the bridge. Well, there would be another bump—it did not matter . . . Yes it did, my word! Look there! Lifted high up, the top of the bridge platform was still leaning slightly forward. A few more pounds in the counter-weights were needed to make it quite vertical. Our rigging was threatened not only by the platform, but also, higher still, by the parallel lever-arm, still faintly throbbing up and down. More by good luck than by skill, I avoided a full shock in the shrouds. First the wireless aerial became caught and snapped like a fiddle string. Then the bridge took hold of the vang. The thick steel wire began to stretch . . . stretched some more, trying to check the impact of our hundred and twenty tons still under way. The bridge came down crookedly a few feet; a small piece of green-painted iron fell on deck; threatening cracking sounds were heard. I jumped back as far as possible, not knowing whether the bridge or our sprit would fall first. Then the steel wire exploded. . . . At last the *Volunteer* stood motionless within ten feet of a butcher's cottage exhibiting in its window the pale jelly-like head of a dead pig grinning at us.

It all happened so quickly that I could only stare. Baranger, trained by years of sailing with windjammers, climbed up the bridge to free our backstay. Yves, our wit, said that we had found a new way of playing the mandolin. The Colonel went ashore with our pilot and began cursing

the bridge-keeper for not having worked his machinery to the last inch. The keeper replied that we had had no business to come forward so soon. At that the Colonel accused our pilot of having given the order to furl the sails too late, probably because he did not know where the bridge was himself . . . a remark which did not tend to improve relations between Great Britain and Holland.

Apart from this unfortunate mishap I liked Woudbrugge and its harmonious appearance. In Holland the light is unique: mirrored in water, the uninterrupted skies pour down a silvery brightness which beautifies everything. In this sunny silence, Yves spliced the vang. I sat near him with palm and needle, sewing a curtain for the engine-room. Even with canvas as thick as mine, Yves declared I ought to be able to stitch a length of eight yards in an hour. A good sailmaker should take nine stitches to each length of his needle. In the saloon our boss prepared a report for the insurance company.

We managed to make Rotterdam and Veerhaven the same evening. But first our pilot put us aground, once in the old Rhine near the Alphen bridge, and a second time before the railway bridge at Gouda. He could never make up his mind in time if he wanted the auxiliary started. In the Gouda lock, overcrowded with barges as usual, I jumped ashore to settle our tax before the pilot had time to move: it amounted to one fourth of what we had paid a week before.

At Rotterdam, Reens the ship-chandler called to say that, according to a telephone message from Woudbrugge, the damage to the bridge was estimated at a hundred pounds sterling, as traffic would be interrupted for a week. We ought to have sent for Reens at once, so that he could have made the estimate for us, probably a very much lower one. We learnt also that, on our report, the signature of Baranger, a foreign captain, was not valid with an English insurance company.

Dining at the Yacht Club, we found that the story of our

accident had already gone the rounds. Our unpleasant pilot—and to think that we had paid him sixteen guilders a day—had declared in the pub next door that we were all fools, that he had had to do everything on board, that the repairs to the bridge would cost twelve hundred guilders, and that the barge would be seized as the Colonel hadn't got a single bean!

Next day, telephoning for the weather forecast, I learned that a bad sea was running off the Hook, with wind from the N.N.E. As this was really a fair wind for sailing to France, I slightly exaggerated the report, in order that we might stay in harbour and give the men a day's rest.

We were busy all the same. A carpenter built a shelf near the engine: it was discovered that the accumulators were partly broken; and I dismissed the good but dirty cook because I discovered that he left food rotting in the corners of the cupboards. It was decided that I should try to cook till we got to Ostend, where we could easily find someone else for the job.

Our delayed departure was responsible for an addition to our ship's company. While we were having drinks at the Club, we met the well-dressed young man who had helped me to overtake the *Volunteer* a week ago. He was in open revolt against his family; he was 'fed up' with wealthy people and their surroundings; and he had just refused a ready-made job in one of his father's offices. His father ruled one of the biggest Dutch condensed milk firms. He wanted to live in the country and devote all his time to writing. His parents were threatening to cut off his allowance, but he did not care as he thought he could easily find a job as stoker on some tramp. He had discussed everything with his elder sisters, who sounded sensible. One was an artist, and the other spent her fortune helping unmarried mothers. If I remember rightly one of them had said that what mattered most in life was that the younger generation should be given a chance to live more fully. . . .

I thought the young man was quite right. He looked as if a change would do him good. There was something soft and plump about him: he needed hardening under his white skin. He was rather blasé, having mixed only with the *jeunesse dorée* of Oxford, Zürich, Paris and Berlin. I felt that before he could write anything worth while, he had to live. What did he know about the difficulty of finding a job, the threat of hunger, the competition hidden everywhere, the effort of learning more in order to 'get on', the personal interests which rule most actions and which are responsible for so much moral prostitution. Later I read those lines which seemed written for him—and for so many others:

"They have cradled you in custom they have primed you with their preaching,
They have soaked you in convention through and through,
They have put you in a show case; you're a credit to their teaching——
But can't you hear the wild?—It's calling you."

The Colonel at once offered to take him with us, and told him that he would only be charged for his food, as Miss Ella would certainly see that he made himself useful on board. I agreed with the proposition. Not only, as we said, would we be helping to rescue a soul trying to escape from the 'iron claws' of materialism . . . but we would secure a Dutch interpreter who would see to it that we were no longer the laughing-stock of the Netherlands. I also thought that well-bred as he was, he would make a charming companion for the Owner, so that I might have some time to myself.

Van—as we were to call him—arrived on board next day with a suitcase. He fed with the crew, hiding from his employer, while we had a last meal at the smart "Koninklijke Roei—en-Zeilvereeniging 'De Maas'."

We were off at two o'clock on the 11th of May, pushed along by powerful squalls coming from the north. It pleased

the men immensely to know that the barge was bound for Ostend and France. We were through with threatening bridges and cumbersome banks . . . through with a land which provided "pas de possibilité de boire un verre" while spinning a yarn with people who spoke a civilised language. Personally I agreed with Baranger on this last point; I should feel frightfully lost were I to live in the country of the Poles, of the Czechs, or of the Dutch, whose languages are weighed down with too many consonants.

Yves, while steering the old barge, initiated Van into the various ways by which we got into touch with a new country. His descriptions were so graphic and so witty—though hardly exaggerated—that Van found himself putting them into verse, which I shall transcribe for you in due course.

We had to abandon our poetical activity because danger loomed ahead. We suddenly found ourselves in the teeth of a violent wind, unable to go about, and drifting. Baranger could not start that dreadful engine of ours. Sideways, our quarter crushed heavily against a solid wooden beacon, which tore the hoisted dinghy out of her davits, casting her adrift. For once, brailing up and letting go the anchor was done in record time!

The barge had been brought up just short of a small pier on which spectators were already gathered. We examined the damage. The mainsail was torn near the clew, the vang's tackle had parted, and, of our lovely dinghy there remained only transom and sail hanging from the davit; the hull itself was not completely smashed, however, and some local people obligingly restored it to us.

It was vital to clear off as soon as possible from the dangerous neighbourhood of the pier. We thought we might have to send for a tug, as the men seemed to be working in vain at the auxiliary. But at last the well-known tremor, making all the brass rods of the skylights vibrate, warned me that we could start. And with a push that bent the boat-hook, Yves turned her bowsprit in the right direction. Van had just been given a perfect demonstration of the

barge's antics, and was discovering that life on a yacht is not so easy as it sounds.

Meanwhile the Colonel, very annoyed by the last incident, had said sharply to Baranger something which sounded like: "Maintenont, attontion, ici sont les commondes!" He had a nasal way of pronouncing French which was comical as a rule, but Baranger did not laugh. If the owner wanted to take charge of manœuvres, it meant that he did not trust his captain, whereas it was not the captain's fault if the engine did not start. After this outburst the Colonel excelled himself in tactlessness by trying to teach Yves how to mend a sail! Well, Yves had his faults; he was liable to answer too boldly or drink too much, but he knew practically everything there is to know about a sailing-ship. (So much so that I had taken down his address in case I should one day need a real sailor.) Yves got furious and began to stage a scene of open rebellion. He was doubly resentful as the Colonel had just scored heavily by successfully showing his distrustful crew how easy it was to lower sail and mast to the deck, in order to mend the recent damage.

Feelings were running high when we reached Maasluis, beyond the industrial town of Schiedam, where we put in for repairs. Van adroitly invited the Colonel to visit a nearby church, as we were all in need of some respite. Though these frequent bickerings were always due to some silly grumble, I could never prevent their explosion. It was only on the following day that I could make the protagonists laugh at their ridiculous touchiness.

CHAPTER XXI

Caught by the Mud

Next day we went as far as the Hook of Holland, and quickly came back into the shelter of the canal: the open sea, where we had been longing to disport ourselves, was a horrible sheet of white foam pushed along by a sou'westerly gale. We decided to sail through the lowlands which clog the muddy mouths of the entwined Maas, Scheldt and Rhine.

The *Volunteer* retraced her course until, to starboard, she could round the Rozenbourg peninsula and sail southwards down the Nieuwe Maas. We entered the lock at Nieuwesluis without mishap, and began thudding along the straight and rather dull canal that cut the island of Voorne in two.

A clacking sound from the barge's entrails . . . The engine stopped, and we bumped violently into a soft bank. The Colonel courageously went down to explore the ailing machinery and found it smoking. There was a strong smell of burning, so he thoughtfully poured some cold water on the suffering pistons! It was the finishing touch, as the sudden cold made the overheated metal contract, and the fly-wheel became immovable. It was our old complaint: fat brown weeds had choked the water inlet.

In the calm of the afternoon it suddenly sounded as if dozens of birds were pecking at our deck: raindrops were pattering down in the silence. A fresh wind had sprung up from the north, so we let our sails push us towards help. I had just had time to pick two daisies in the wild grass.

Hellevoetsluis, the small town where we stopped, had once been a naval base, and Van found a dockyard engineer to whom he described the symptoms of our recurring breakdowns. Good mechanics came and unscrewed every bolt

they could lay hands on, until they found that the main bearing had been eaten away—(or something else perhaps, as I know nothing about engines). But I stayed below to watch how these sturdy men worked. They squatted, they searched, they juggled with greasy spanners; they sweated, they hardly ever spoke. Tea-time had long passed, and dinner too, but still they carried on: at last I brought them coffee and sandwiches. They went away carrying what they thought was the cause of our trouble, which they said they would recast during the night . . . they were nice chaps with round faces, straight looks, and bow legs, and they seemed quite happy to have found some extra work!

Eight hours later they came back out of a grey morning, and reassembled everything they had taken down, but the engine was just as mulish as before. Eventually a brainy little officer was sent for, who suggested doing something to the magneto, and soon our whole machinery was pulsating again. We left after we had paid our debts, and I had bought milk and fish from the local people who appeared on the quay.

We progressed steadily through an inland sea where the mewing gulls were at their swinging games, and the fresh wind was heavy with ozone and iodine. Van, newly escaped from Rotterdam, had the holiday feeling. Everything amused him—the queer French words used by Yves, or the way the Colonel drank his tea out of a slop-basin.

The low countries of Voorne and Putten vanished behind us as we sailed diagonally across a wide sound on our course towards the Vuile Gap, south of Beierland. Navigation under power seemed easy, and we had set our reaching board so that it was bound to bring us to the entrance of the Gap. The general atmosphere reminded me of my first day in tidal seas, long ago, when we had left Brightlingsea to navigate the Spitway, and England had become hazy and unreal. The same impression had forced itself upon me then. What had happened to the solid land? On the horizon, in the most unsuspected places, I could detect thin, pale

lines of sand—or was it mud, or earth? Except from the air it is impossible to decide where the banks end and the shores of Holland begin. At last we picked up a bifurcation buoy which we thought we could identify on the map; a freighter, too, seemed to show us the way. But when we overtook her, the skipper told us we were north of Beierland, whereas our Vuile Gap lay south of it.

With the engine working well we soon finished our half turn, and the Colonel, trusting to the low draught of the *Volunteer*, decided to cut straight across the shallow water without rounding the big buoy we had seen.

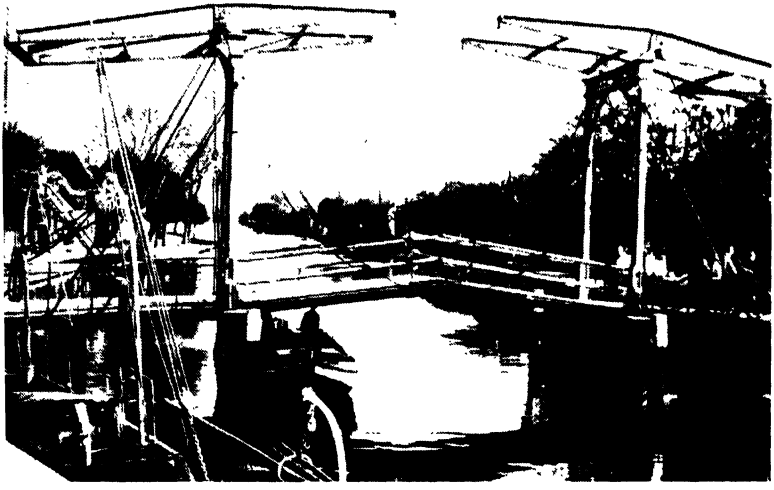
Suddenly the whole world seemed queer! I felt no shock, heard no sound; but looking down at the sea, it seemed as if we were going backwards, so fast was the ebb-tide taking the yellow waters away. We were stranded, miles from any land worth the name. Baranger wanted to set the mainsail, as a good heel over might free us from the sticky ground, and allow us to reach the depths we had just forsaken. But seeing so much water round him, the Colonel could not take things seriously, and insisted on trying to force the barge ahead, shouting: "Ici sont les commondes!" But the mud-bank had caught us. There was nothing to do but wait for the next high water, round about one o'clock that morning. Yves triced the two leeboards as high as possible, and the anchor went down, making a silly flat splash in two feet of water. The second anchor was put in the dinghy, rowed some forty yards at right-angles to the barge, and dropped in the channel.

We were not completely abandoned. A skipper rowed towards us from a sailing botter anchored in the channel, and promised to come at midnight to lend us a hand. To get a tug to pull us out would cost us no less than eighty guilders, he told us. He was a handsome man, clean and young. His very fair eyebrows and moustache stood out clearly against his red-brown skin, and his eyes were keen and active.

I was afraid our enforced rest would be too much of a strain on the Colonel's constant need for activity. But he

TUGS IN BUSY ROTTERDAM

QUIET WATERS IN AMSTERDAM



THE FATAL BRIDGE AT WOUDBRUGGE

THE BARGE IMPLORING THE SKY

chatted away to Van about the farming business in Holland, and was soon giving us a lecture on live-stock, cross-breeding, amounts of milk to be expected, etc. He was experimenting on his estate with the latest tricks advertised by model farms, and he proudly described how the tails of his cows were tied up to a girder for the sake of cleanliness.

We went early to bed, and soon after midnight we were all on deck as we had planned, buffeted by an icy north-westerly squall which shook our grounded hull. Fortunately by working hard at the windlass I was able to forget the piercing cold of the night, as well as the queer fear that maybe the sun would never come back. Our efforts to float the barge were fruitless. We only dragged the anchor until it was alongside, a useless hook that could not give us the liberty we wanted. We stopped the powerless engine, and remained squatting near the saloon stove, warming our hands and feet.

Immobilised in a no-man's-land of the elements, belonging neither to the earth nor to the sea, we felt forgotten and beyond time. Alone in the middle of the night, the *Volunteer* was like an outcast far from the world's lines of life, which are marked on maps by railways, steamer services, telephone, aeroplane and telegraph communications. We were not steeped in the silence of the high sea, in a ship alive and moving. Nor were we surrounded by the silence of a harbour, broken by a man's call, a mongrel's bark, the crunch of a squeezed fender, or a drain splashing from half-way down a wall. We lay, a motionless prey of solitude in the heart of a wind we could make no use of. Now and then a stronger wave rocked our hull shakily in its bed.

"But 'twas only with the peep of light we saw how ill we lay . . ." We sat in the middle of a dark plain of greasy mud. Our quickest way to reach a channel was to go stern first the way we had come. Or supposing we could make the barge do a quarter turn to starboard, we could then try to go ahead. Baranger was all for trying the second way, as the barge had more chance of moving bow first, where she

was not weighed down by her heavy engines. Wearing boots, one could walk on the ground which had caught us, and Van was sent to the nearest village, as the Colonel wanted a tug to drag us away from our tenacious surroundings.

On foot too, the men carried the anchor and its chain astern, following the barge's tracks still visible in the plastic ground. If one stood still for a while on the grey, puddingy surface, it sank gently under one's weight. A faint sucking sound accompanied the lifting of one's boot, and moisture gathered in one's footsteps. . . .

I was preparing our lunch when Van came back. He had discovered a village behind the dikes called Goudwaert, and had arranged for a motor-lighter to give us a pull. At high tide everybody worked hard, full of courage, we at the windlass hauling in while the pawls clinked slowly. Combining our efforts with those of the lighter, we brought the barge half a length astern: that was all we gained towards freedom. The lighter soon gave up helping, disgusted at having caught the bight of our hawser in her propeller; and she went off with our good line.

Once more we were left to ourselves.

The situation was not quite so funny as we had thought at first. We had not worried, because we knew that for three days to come, until the 18th of May, the tides were increasing, and we had felt certain there would be enough water to float us. But now things looked a bit different. The weight of the *Volunteer*, together with the slight rocking created by the waves at high-tide, was every day digging under us a deeper bed. Not only would we need sufficient depth of water, but also plenty of horse-power to counteract the suction working along our flat bottom. Supposing we were too firmly embedded to move, we would be at the mercy of a storm blowing at high water, hurling breaker after breaker at our innumerable skylights, and roller after roller against our rotten hull. Yves stopped telling us about his long letter home, in which he described the cheap allotment we had secured for

the summer along the Dutch sea-front, where there was no need to put up a fence because our neighbours were not too near: the only little trouble being that the drive did not quite lead to the entrance door. . . .

A successful manœuvre had to be thought of pretty soon, if we did not want to spend some awkward weeks waiting for the next spring tide.

In the meantime, I decided to have a look at the natives of Beierland, and I rowed ashore in the dinghy with Van and Le Roux. It was not so easy as it sounds, because we could not find our private 'drive' as Yves called it, or rather the nearest dike. After fighting the ebb, the dinghy went aground among some reeds, while a wide ditch of water still separated us from the land.

In Goudwaert we bought fish and butter, and the windows of the shops we entered were blackened by children looking at us eagerly from outside, flattening their pink faces against the glass. In spite of a long search, I could not find any vegetables, and every time we stopped we were asked a string of questions, to which Van replied with inexhaustible good humour. I soon believed myself to be something very rare, when I saw everyone rushing out to have a look at me . . . had we been shipwrecked off the coast of Iceland we could not have excited more curiosity.

We found the lighter which had abandoned us, and arranged that she should try again, this time with stronger hawsers. On our way back I was amused to see a row of wooden clogs in front of every cottage door, belonging to the people who had entered the house. Later I was to observe the same custom amongst the Japanese and the Mohammedans, people anxious to keep their rooms as clean as possible. Shoes are left outside, and one walks in with stockinged feet.

Returning to the dinghy was most tiring. It meant struggling against a head wind, bent double, dropping now a bottle of beer, now a bag of potatoes. We rowed towards the *Volunteer* with difficulty, and arrived so late that we

found her high and dry once more. We had to anchor the dinghy, and walk the last part of our journey. Sea-gulls and sand-pipers had left their footprints on the soft earth, which I imagined looked a bit like our planet the day it surged out of the Flood. The drier patches were ribbed with tiny ripple marks, as if the sea had wanted to imprint there the wavelets into which the soft wind had too fugitively shaped her ever-moving surface. The shrill cries and raucous calling of the gulls made up the orchestration to our stranded days in Holland.

In an immense sky besmeared with dark, vaporous rags of cloud, the sunset cast a dead light on the curdled, motionless surface all round us, from which the sea had vanished.

We had topped the bowsprit so that it would not hinder the tug's work, and it pointed at the sky in a ridiculous way, at the same time threatening and imploring the leaden-coloured clouds. We went to sleep with the dusk, as we could do no more that day, the second we had spent aground. Once more, in the middle of the night, we got up and manned the windlass, hoping for the best. We groaned and panted at our work, and my hands felt as if the skin would come off and stick to the metallic handles. Now and then we were surrounded by a whiff of warm smoke from the galley funnel. But the flood was very weak and we could not even get the anchor chain on board. We turned in disheartened.

At breakfast the Colonel said he had prepared for the worst. As we seemed to be sinking into the mud about three inches every day, he had written a telegram for the insurance people, telling them that a total loss must be faced. There was one last hope. According to Baranger, the water which had failed to arrive with the night tide would come with the afternoon flood and might perhaps float us. Or else, a battalion of men might be ordered to dig a channel through which the water could reach us. So far our bearings, taken on to buoys, had remained exactly the same.

Baranger and his men took advantage of the next low tide to move the anchors again. After they had dragged nearly all the chain of the main hook in the right direction, they found the last links deeply buried under the bow. It meant getting spades from the land to free the chain. No wonder we had achieved nothing during the night! By mid-day spades had been brought—of course, we had not thought to add such implements to the yacht's outfit—and the men began digging out a cave under our bow to unearth the chain. It was hard work, and Yves expressed the general feeling by saying: "On se fait rentrer le gras dans le maigre!"

In the afternoon, the young flood came in fast, pushed by a north-westerly wind. We hoisted the staysail, and turned the windlass handles, while a wire line sent from our lighter tautened, trembled, strained for all it was worth. But the traction was seldom in a straight line. The Dutch barge was zigzagging and pulling from every possible direction, like an ant which has got hold of too large a bean.

We began to move; our engine was working also, and our chain straightened. While we were paying out the line of the second anchor streamed at right angles, it unexpectedly came to an end and the men fell on deck without having either lengthened it, or fastened a floater to it. . . .

At last our tug brought us into the channel, where we anchored, while the Colonel distributed drinks below to our bargee friends. They wanted to know how our wireless loud-speaker worked, and we had to show them the soda-making machine in action. The plump children who listened to the gramophone were given *fruits confits;* and their fathers were presented with cigars as well as the eight pounds sterling for which they asked. The Colonel's big curved pipe was a prominent feature of the entertainment.

Our bargemen promised to rescue our anchor and bring it to Flushing within the next two days. And this time we took a pilot with us, so that we should not go astray again in that treacherous delta land. How good it was to be free

instead of sinking in the mud! . . . It was true the *Volunteer* was a rotten old tub, a box-shaped boat with an arched spine, a floating thing which was nearing the end of its time. But I had grown fond of her, and of the lumpy way she laboured through the waves with her battened weather leeboard thumping. Thanks to her I had been able to look Southampton straight in the eye—Southampton, my first landing place, which had hidden the whole of England for me behind its low, unimpressive front! . . .

And the *Volunteer* had taught me to grow fond of an English country gentleman, like the thousands who must have lived in the past, breeding his pheasants with as much care as his pigs, pleased to show connoisseurs his precious spoons, or his collection of 'heads' brought back from darkest Africa (everything from the pathetic gazelle to the ugly rhino looked down at you from the high walls), eager for you to try his best year of Hautbriond's *chambré à point* with his French chef's *morilles à la crème*, amused to drive you round his lovely Wiltshire in a twenty-years-old Rolls Royce, on the chassis of which he had constructed a high body, because "a gentleman wants to get into an automobile without having to sit down on the floor boards"—a position from which he could never have got up without a special derrick. (After such a tour, Stone the chauffeur, a strong chap, would step out of the dicky, green from having been hurled violently from side to side round blind corners—while if you thought it politic to show a little nervousness, you were told to fear nothing because the Colonel owned driving licence number seven.) He called himself the Bulephant; looked—and still looks—the perfect Colonel Blimp; behaved like a spoilt child, capable of being in the same minute the most charming and the most exasperating person you ever met; able to disguise his acute attack of gout because you thought he was playing a part; and last but not least, proud to be the best host you ever met, putting his country seat, as well as his London hotel, at your disposal.

This is a poor effort at portraying the Colonel, and I have

forgotten to mention his rheumatic peke "Missy", and his ambassadorial old butler . . . All my facts may be wrong; there is probably not a single gazelle's head in his study, no doubt Chambertin and not claret ought to be drunk with morilles, while old spoons are surely called something quite different (like the 'dogs' and the 'mister' which turn into 'hounds' and 'sir' as soon as they get into touch with the more exalted spheres of society). But this is the best I can do to give you an idea of the man the old *Volunteer* had brought me to know.

You can imagine my feelings for the rescued barge. She had given me my independence, and had made it possible for me to knock about. As I explained to Van, not only did I have the pleasure of living a life I loved, but I also enjoyed being more than a dilettante; I had less contempt for myself than when I lived in Geneva, and it was as good a feeling as it was a new one. In a foolish way I felt superior to Van; because I had looked for jobs in Paris and London I imagined I knew what 'roughing it' was. How silly I was to be proud of so little, attained while I was still sheltered by the solid background built up of home, parents, a peaceful fatherland, a valid passport! Later on, life in Berlin and Moscow opened my eyes to the importance of these essentials whose values I had not recognised.

Compared with my tense hardness, Van was soft and quite charming. To tease me, the Colonel pretended he had 'fallen' for me, but I knew better. Van was bored, and the *Volunteer* had provided a good opportunity for breaking away. To my mind the boy ought to have been left completely penniless for a year or two. He had no real anxiety in him, no plan for immediate action, and he still had some money waiting for him. He was bad at peeling potatoes, but he had an ear for music, and while I prepared the meals, he step-danced to the accompaniment of the gramophone playing 'Dinah', if I remember well, or Jack Smith's tunes:

"When the red, red robin
Comes bob, bob, bobbing, along!"

Pushed by violent gusts of wind, we flew up the Vuile Gap. The evening of our rescue, we put into Duiteloort harbour, hidden behind a green dike sprinkled with peaceful cows. Before we were safely moored, the piece of steel wire coming through the deck which controlled the throttle, gave way, and it became impossible to work the engine. We managed to take a line to a barge and make fast alongside. Slowly and silently, out of every deckhouse, square, fair faces appeared, curious to study the *Volunteer* and her foreign inmates.

Van and the pilot went ashore to deal with the problem of refuelling at night, because we wanted to be off next morning with the four o'clock tide. For dinner I had to open a tin of reindeer tongue, which proved to be a feast for ever linked in my memory with this Dutch port.

When I was at school, I could not understand the water system of Holland, and now that I had seen what it looked like, I was more at a loss than ever. After our rescue we had sailed further inland, passing between the mainland and the long island of Over Flakke, which stretches its gooselike head towards the North Sea. As far as I could make out, Duiteloort was on the shore of the most westerly outlet of the Maas, though with the Lek, the Waal, and the Old Rhine also belonging to the same system of entwined waters, I hardly knew which was which.

After leaving Duiteloort we were to sail through a broad piece of estuary called the Volkerak. Then we were to follow a narrow passage between the mainland and another of these long islands, gigantic clots of sand spread across the navigable arteries of a big river. This channel would lead us into the eastern arm of the Scheldt estuary.

As we reached that part of the world, a succession of terrific squalls struck us, whistling along the flat surface of the water. The mating of a black sky with a dark, gloomy

sea seemed to have produced a cataclysm of yellowish decomposing cloud, pushed along at hurricane speed by the fury of the wind. Holes began to appear in our mainsail just as the engine went on strike once more.

Beating among a fleet of Dutch barges we did our utmost to reach Zandkreek, between the islands of North and South Beveland. Our lame pilot, his toothless mouth constantly chewing a cigar, was most efficient: he decided to continue tacking under a reduced mainsail until a powerful motor-boat could take us in tow.

But the Colonel, terrified at the idea that we might be driven ashore, did not want to linger. An English motor-yacht had just passed us, and he ordered Le Roux and Van to jump into our motor dinghy, overtake the yacht, and ask them to send us a tug as soon as possible. They tried to obey, making wild signals to the yacht when they saw she was much faster than they had thought . . . but all in vain. They returned, came alongside the *Volunteer*, stopped their engine, and caught the line we threw. But our speed was too much for the little open boat; her bow plunged under water and she nearly sank. Van was standing forward, and his hand was so scorched by the rope that he let go everything and jumped on board, helped by me. Le Roux was all right, and kept on rowing until we could pick him up safely. It had been a narrow shave, and Yves let out strings of amazing words to explain how mad the Colonel was to send men out in such a wind.

At last, after we had reached the longed-for Zandkreek, the *Volunteer* was towed alongside a lighter, through a strait lined with black sands. The skies were again so oppressingly black, so low, and moving so fast, that one felt inclined to kneel down and pray for mercy.

At Veere we entered the Magdeburg canal, which cuts the island of Walcheren in two. The end of another hard day's work was near, and we were only six miles from Flushing. A kind old man who sold me bread, eggs, and lettuces (one of which was blown on to the water by the

wind) had queer ear-rings which reminded me of our Appenzeller peasants living in the heart of the continent, far from the sea.

While we were in the remote places of Holland, we had fallen into the habit of saying, 'When we get to Flushing . . .' At last we were nearing the hardly won goal, and in the evening we were there, peacefully tied in the dock, with a feeling of having come from the back of beyond. The ship-chandler came on board with an electrician, as our dynamo had gone wrong two days ago, forcing us to do without electric light.

Hitching up my slacks, I went ashore with the men, to share a pitcher I had promised them long ago. Yves, pleased to think that he was getting nearer to France, became talkative, and our narrow escape from drowning in the mud reminded him of a grim experience. He had been in the ship *Somme*, a three-masted fore-and-after, bound for Seville with a load of kaolin. Off Ushant it blew great guns, and a south-westerly storm shifted to the north-west. The wrath of the squalls was such that the mainsail burst right across and then vanished. Three weeks were lost at Camaret while the necessary repairs were done, and then they started once more for Spain. They were in the Biscay when the mate relieved Yves of his watch. The weather was fine, but the hull was so old, according to Yves, that one could have climbed up its rugged planking. Yves reported that the pumps were clear, and still coupled to the engine.

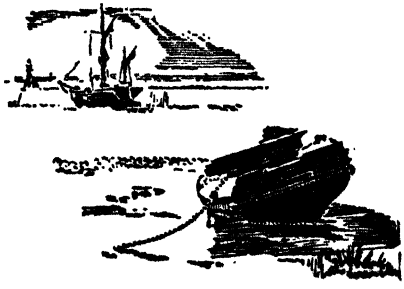
Two hours later the mate woke him up, asking him if he had really pumped properly, as water was still pouring out. It was a disturbing fact. Of course the poor ship had had a frightful shake up off Ushant, which probably explained what was happening. A sounding gave sixteen inches of bilge water. All hands were put on the extra pumps. There was just enough air to fill the sails, and the ship was as straight as a ferry boat. Two hours later the sounding gave twenty-four inches. . . . With the wind from the west, they could

have run for Brest; but no, enough time and money had been wasted already, and the captain carried on. Next day, in spite of uninterrupted pumping, there was over three feet of water in the ship. The decision was taken: the open boats were made ready. But the water-logged *Somme* could not be abandoned, as, coming head to wind, she would have drifted for ages. Apparently, a captain has the right to sink his ship when less than eight inches of freeboard remain. So the halliards were cut, paraffin was sprinkled over her, and a few holes were made with an axe before she was set on fire. Crackling flames came out of the blazing ship, her list increased, and she settled down still further in the water.

Suddenly she fell on her beam ends, the keel appeared, and she made a complete turn before the masts came up for the last time. Then the poop burst, and the hull gave out a tremendous whistling while it moved at miraculous speed towards the frightened crew. They rowed like lunatics for a while . . . She sank. . . .

There was no wind, and they found themselves alone on the surface of the sea. It was three long days before a Dutch boat picked them up, but they learnt that they would have to go as far as Le Havre with their rescuers. As no other ship was sighted, although they heard by wireless that a destroyer was looking for them, they decided to push off on their own, and eventually they reached the coast.

This unforgettable episode provided Yves with one more sailors' yarn to spin at café tables!



CHAPTER XXII

Trouble at Ostend

In Flushing, Yves had to mend our mainsail, and the whole rigging was lowered to the great entertainment of the local people. The *Volunteer* had leeboards like their own boats, but otherwise her rig was little known, if I am to judge by the curiosity it aroused. All round us, were fishing-smacks, and seen from in front, their bluff bows looked like coconuts in a row. Our men fixed up a line between the stay and the mast on which to dry their washing; and talked of what they would do when they reached France.

Our orders were to reach Ostend as soon as possible, and wait there for the Colonel, who had to return to his estate in England for a few days. We left Flushing as soon as the mast was up again, and the barge had five new patches in her mainsail. From the deck I could only guess where Zeebrugge was, as we made our way over an oily sea with the help of the auxiliary. My thoughts went to the sailors who stormed the famous mole, and I envied the tense moments they had lived through, united by the same determination to succeed, certain that what they were doing was worth fighting and dying for. Would I ever find myself, in a like situation, experiencing the same enthusiasm?

We passed many Ostend trawlers busy with their patient work, and in spite of the unpleasant smell and the quivering of the engine, I felt at peace. I decided to do all I could to give the men a quiet time at Ostend, without contradictory orders. At mid-day we entered the lock; at one o'clock we came out into the first *bassin;* at two the bridge swung open and we made for the second *bassin.* Just as I was thinking: "As soon as the Colonel is away, the engine behaves like an

angel," it stopped, and only after some tiresome pulling on ropes did we find ourselves safely tied up in front of the Hotel du Lion. Van tried to be useful, but I could not help teasing him, because he always looked as if he was afraid of dirtying his flannel trousers—especially when he had to haul on warps covered as a rule with samples of the refuse floating about the harbour.

On the other side of the dock stood the sheds of a shipyard. It was here that the *Insoumise* had spent many months while she was being converted into a yacht. On the quay I met Peter Meier, who had worked with the Admiral, and who wanted to offer his services again, as he did not like his present boss.

I was expecting to hear from the Admiral, and if he were still short of deck-hands, I had a solution to offer. Yves and Van might both like to help. I had talked it over with Yves —deep-water man who was longing to get aboard a 'real' ship—and he was eager to join the Admiral's crew. I described the beauties of the *Insoumise* in detail, as well as the plans for her coming cruise, and the wide experience of her owner. Everything sounded so perfect to him that he was ready to ask for a low wage, once he understood that money was not plentiful. I felt no remorse at kidnapping one of the *Volunteer's* ship's company, as I felt sure Yves was going to quit anyhow.

I also discussed the matter with Van. His future was most uncertain and he wanted to mark time. After I had explained the Admiral's difficulty, I added: "If you could look useful, you might be approved of, and given a chance to cruise with the *Insoumise*. And if you could afford to help a little with expenses, you would be more than welcome." Van replied that it was quite an idea, and I was pleased at having planned this masterly arrangement. Van, who needed more money and more clothes, went back to Rotterdam for a day or two.

I was kept busy sending Le Roux back home and looking for a cook. And I opened a telegram of congratulation from

the Colonel, who had learnt of our safe arrival at Ostend on receiving a poem composed by Van. All was well, and in two days my ship would be in perfect order.

But . . .

I was in my cabin that evening, when I heard a stick knocking on deck. I jumped out and saw two men looking rather serious. One of them was the harbour-master, the other an uncle of Reens, our ship-chandler in Rotterdam. We sat in the saloon, and with much kindness they warned me that they had bad news. The cheque the Colonel had signed in Rotterdam to pay for all the expenses we had incurred in Holland, had been refused in London the same morning. Reens' uncle had come especially from Brussels to look after his nephew's interests. And the *Volunteer* was going to be seized at noon next day. . . .

I was speechless. This Dutch cruise of ours was ending with a most unpleasant surprise. What could I do?

I smiled, saying that it was simply impossible. I would communicate with the owner at once. I changed the conversation to the *Insoumise*, and was soon listening to unlimited praise of the Admiral, a man the like of whom is seldom met with to-day. The harbour-master said he had helped him to buy the *Insoumise* for the incredibly small sum of £400.

As soon as they had gone, I discussed matters with Baranger. We could not believe the Colonel would leave us in such a predicament. It seemed as if somebody was trying to do us down, and we had a feeling that ship-chandlers were being too clever for us. The *Volunteer* could not escape as the *Amenartas* had done: we could only mark time until the Colonel arrived. He could quickly sell the barge to Baranger, so that she could not be seized.

Next day the harbour-master appeared with his official papers. I tried to humour him again, but everything seemed hopeless. . . . Then Uncle Reens breezed in with a carnation in his button-hole. He had just received a letter saying that the Colonel had himself stopped the cheque! His agents

in London had told him that it was not his job to pay for the bridge we had damaged, and his letter contained a new cheque covering the barge's expenses only.

No sooner had this episode been settled than my crew got out of hand. As I had found a real cook to take my place below, Le Roux had been dismissed. Duly paid, he kept on grumbling, asking for a clothing allowance about which I knew nothing. Baranger was *en bombe*, ashore most of the time. Worse than that, he brought his *bonne amie* on board at four o'clock one morning. Yves, who had been soberly asleep, got up in a rage and began abusing his captain. Lying in my bunk I heard everything, but I was not going to deal with a drunken man. I thought of sailing away at once without waiting for the Colonel's return. In the morning Baranger went for Yves, to re-establish his prestige. Poor, black-eyed Yves, he had enough worries already. A letter from home had told him that his wife was no longer staying with a friend, and he did not know where she was. Yves wanted to quit, he was sick of it all. Not only was the barge no good, but now "even my captain is no better than myself . . ." he said.

Most of this trouble had been sown by the mean Le Roux, who wanted the whole crew to go back to France with him. And the tale he had spread was just silly. "Back in Calais," he had told the others, "you will all get the sack. The Colonel hates you. You might just as well come with me now. Van was pushed about by Baranger at Rotterdam; he has complained to the Colonel, saying that Baranger is a bad Frenchman. . . . Yes, I have heard him say so."

Yves wanted his wages so that Le Roux could give them to his wife, once he had found her in Le Havre. But I could not do more than pay the dismissed man. I hadn't yet received a 'bean' myself, and Baranger was lending money to the men's mess until the Colonel returned. In spite of my assurance, the men were afraid they would never be paid. Scarcity of money was responsible for much of the trouble. . . .

Then I discovered that my new cook was just out of three months' jail in Bruges! I wired to London for Old Revell, the flat-footed steward of two years ago.

At last the Colonel came back. "Yes, yes," he said, "I've got money. It will arrive to-morrow morning, don't be so impatient." But Yves was not reassured. He kept on threatening and imploring, describing his wife as starving miserably in Le Havre. . . . The flow of French was so unbearable to the Colonel that he hardly dared come aboard his barge-yacht. We would see him loafing at the other end of the dock. Then he would try to return, creeping down the companion as silently as possible, making sure that the door leading forward was well closed. It was quite amusing, as he always landed on the floor with a mighty thump. . . .

I could not help laughing at the latest additions to Van's 'poem'.

THE *VOLUNTEER*

I feel that just a verse or two
  May very well be penned
About a ship and drunken crew
  Now lying in Ostend.

The *Volunteer* is hailed by all
  The oddest ship afloat,
In fact I hardly dare to call
  The haulking thing a boat.

The ship is queer, the owner mad,
  The crew inclined to drink,
And yet so far she hasn't had
  The energy to sink.

She's been aground almost as much
  As she has been afloat,
She's stayed some time on ev'ry Dutch
  And Belgian bank of note.

Her deck is blue, her bulwark red,
The gunwale pale yellow,
Which proves the owner, as I've said,
An idiotic fellow.

Her rigging is extr'ordin'ry
It's neither Ketch nor Yawl,
Another trip and there will be
No rigging left at all.

She's modernised in ev'ry way,
A motor's been put in it,
In such condition that it may
Burst at any minute.

At sea she is a splendid sight,
As o'er the waves she rolls,
With crew that is completely tight,
And mainsail full of holes.

In ev'ry port I have to do
A duty which I dread,
Undressing all the drunken crew
And putting them to bed.

The orders which you give the crew
They won't obey, but they'll
Explain that they've a diff'rent view
Of how to hoist a sail.

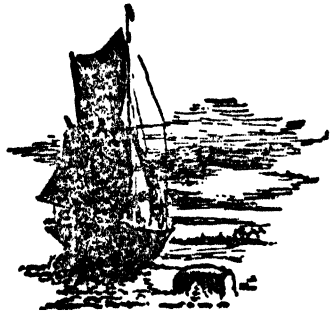
A rotten crew (but one decides
The rotten boat is worse);
At least the rotten whole provides—
A butt—for ROTTEN VERSE.

But things had gone too far with our men. They still begged to be sent home as quickly as possible, though with the yachting season already begun, it would be difficult for them to find work. So as soon as the owner had collected

his money, the accounts were settled. It was not easy: Baranger claimed a month's indemnity, but as his contract was in Le Havre, I did not know which side to take. Three hundred and twenty francs which belonged to Yves were to be paid to him at Le Havre, after he had delivered the clothes he was wearing to our French ship-chandler.

Baranger said he had his own suit with him, and would leave his equipment on board. . . . Unhappily he did not stick to his word and went away with them. Furious, the Colonel dragged me with him to the police, where he wanted me as an interpreter. I went reluctantly, as such a move seemed useless, and I hated making a fuss in Ostend, where the *Volunteer* had already created so much gossip.

What a week!



CHAPTER XXIII

"INSOUMISE"

THE reply-paid telegram sent by the Admiral said: "Can you join forthwith sailing for Plymouth and Spain."

The Colonel knew of my imminent departure. He had found a Belgian master, who was coming with a pal to work on board, and they were cheaper even than the Frenchmen.

Van was back. We left at once for Paris, Le Havre, and Deauville. I had written to the Admiral: ". . . If you care to meet Van I will bring him along. But once I have introduced him to you, I will take no more responsibility for him, as he might not be a success later on." I was curious to see what would happen. For one thing, I had told Van about lovely Diana, warning him that he would fall for her at first sight. "Not as long as you're on board," he had answered; and that day he had brought me a present from the bazaar, wrapped up in the following lines:

On having given a toy sailor and toy boat (which bumps) to Ella Maillart, yachtswoman par excellence.

Oh! Ella dear, you are, I fear
  So extremely in the dumps,
So to cheer you, dear, I bring this queer
  Little sailor-man who bumps.

You are not fond of the Street called Bond,
  As the av'rage girl might be;
The bow *you* fit is the bow called sprit
  And your fitting-room's at sea . . .

I'd have bought such things as glitt'ring rings
The which to wear at Ascot,
If I hadn't known you'd rather own
A simple sailor mascot.

When we reached Deauville, I left Van at the 'Hotel de la Plage', and at last I was walking on the quay in the sunshine, shouting: "*Insoumise*, ahoy!" The Admiral popped on deck, and while he was taking my suitcase, said quickly in a low voice: "Whatever happens, say you can cook." In the saloon, which was as beautiful as ever, tea was just over. Two men, who to me seemed old, studied me sullenly while I recounted some of the *Volunteer's* misadventures. They were the friends and paying-guests of the Admiral. One of them was quite charming, when one realised that he was very deaf—and I shall call him D. The other, a retired naval Captain, was rather fierce—so let us refer to him as F.

"Where is your boy friend?" I was asked at once. "I told him to go to the hotel in case you did not need him. . . ." "Can you cook?" "Yes, sure. I have done nothing else since we left Rotterdam." After this salvo at close range, F. and D. went ashore to play golf.

At last we could talk.

To complete his crew, the Admiral had written to my old friend Guénnec, with whom I had sailed once from La Trinité to Jersey in *La Françoise*. Then the two p.g.'s had been unearthed, both keen to take part in what they thought would be a bachelors' party. F. was a woman-hater. Neither had known anything about Diana until they met her on board. By the time they asked her how long she was going to stay, her charm had worked. Her presence on board was a *fait accompli* and nothing could alter it. "So now," I said to the Admiral, "you want me to do the same trick: win unexpectedly the good-will of your cronies?"

"No, things did not work like that. I should never have dared mention your coming. But I was looking for a cook, when I got your last letter saying that you were playing with

the frying-pan on the *Volunteer*. I told my friends I had had a brainwave, and that you were just the person we wanted. I pretended you had written: 'Can I be of any help to Diana?' Then I mentioned the boy you proposed as deck-hand. They did not like this idea at all. And when you appeared alone on the quay they were very pleased, thinking that Van had not come."

The conclusion of it all was that 'they' did not want a young man with them during the journey. But Van could come with us as far as Plymouth, where we were to pick up another hand.

Guénnec was sent to fetch Van.

As I was unpacking in the ladies' cabin, which I was to share with Diana, she came back from a walk. I looked at her with pleasure. She was younger than myself, but I had always been impressed by the calm of her smooth forehead. She had a delicate chin, cheeks like peaches, and dark blue eyes under wide-set eyebrows. Her Eton crop and her small upturned nose were most attractive.

The white bulkheads of our cabin were covered with pinned photographs and cuttings from fashion-newspapers. Plenty of books in the shelves behind our bunks, cushions on the settees, and a lovely model of a full-rigged ship, made a cosy cabin. I think Diana was glad to see me, as it couldn't have been much fun for her living all that time with so many elderly gentlemen. She said at once that 'they' were a nuisance, as they did nothing but complain.

Diana is the most reserved person I have ever met. I suppose her youth must have been very lonely, as her mother was abroad all the time, and her father came home only at wide intervals. She could be joyful or sick without ever losing her innate dignity. At first I thought she was not very bright, until a few penetrating remarks about her father, or F. and D., showed me how clear-sighted she was, and how little escaped her. Much later, during the Spanish war, after her husband had been killed by her side, she had to escape from Talavera de la Reina with two small children, and I

can imagine her, self-possessed, going through this tragedy without losing any of her beauty or control.

As there was not much food on board, we all dined ashore in the nearest café, a queer gathering if ever there was one.

After the bright oil-paint displayed on the *Volunteer*, I enjoyed the sober white scrubbed deck of our ketch, and her deckhouse. There, sheltered from the wind, one could watch the yachts moving in the harbour, or listen to the remarks of the onlookers on the quay, who never imagine they can be heard.

With Diana, we stuck to the same routine work we had established at Southwick. In the mornings, Mann, the bos'un, lit the coal stove in the galley. While Di laid the table, I cooked the breakfast. After it had been eaten, the men were given their shaving-water, and the gramophone was started and kept playing while we washed up, cleaned and swept the saloon, 'made' the cabins—quickly tidying the sheets and the washstand. We tried to make use of Van, but mostly he changed the records, or sang, now and then wiping a plate or two. In that way the rather tiresome housework which had to be done day after day was made pleasant. While we got ready to go ashore we discussed what on earth we could give 'them' for lunch and dinner. Di bought the provisions I was to cook later. She had to show the accounts to F. every day, as he thought that otherwise we were likely to waste food. And Diana had to tell him what had happened to the last *côtelette*, or the leg-of-mutton bone.

F. was a bachelor and very grumpy. The three of us had a standing challenge: who would be the first to make him smile. . . . He was responsible for the commissariat, and saw in Van and me two superfluous mouths to feed. I hoped to make myself indispensable on deck, but F. did not believe in the efficiency of a mixed crew. As for the Admiral, he seemed to be completely detached from the minor details of domestic organisation. When we went to him, saying that F. was unbearable, he replied simply: "It is your fault.

If you were less silly and knew how to handle him you could twist him round your little fingers."

The Admiral promised me that when we got to Gibraltar he would find a Maltese cook. I had told him that I could not stay below without feeling seasick, though I promised to do my best. 'They' had decided I was to get a little pay, so that I would not grumble too much while peeling potatoes or onions. . . . Anyhow, the sooner we reached the Pillars of Hercules, the better, as then we could do away with this temporary arrangement.

Before leaving Deauville, I explored the Bureau de la Marine, where Guénnec's papers had to be put in order before he could go abroad. Everything depended on Monsieur l'Administrateur, who was away . . . at Caen. Happily, reaching him by telephone was sufficient to settle this complicated matter.

The Admiral gave a farewell party to the friends he had made in Deauville. And at last a launch took us clear of the breakwaters I had already seen from the *Volunteer's* deck. . . . The *Insoumise* was fitted with an auxiliary, but happily the Admiral did not care much for it, and it was seldom in working order.

How different our sailing was from the antics of the barge. Mann knew what the nonchalant signs of the Admiral meant, and the sails went up on the right board, the towline came in, the staysail was kept to windward long enough to cast her on the right tack. We were close-hauled as the wind blew straight from Plymouth, our destination. New to me were our very high bulwarks which isolated us from the sea; sitting on deck and leaning against the deckhouse, one could see nothing but the sky and our grey sails. The *Volunteer's* deck had been on a level with the racing, foaming waters as soon as she heeled over in a steady breeze. On this ketch one felt as if one was in a fortress, strongly protected against the sea.

Well contrasted, also, were the ways of the two vessels in the water. I do not mean to say that the old barge could

not be graceful when flying on a calm surface; but amidst heavy seas, she was just a lump of a box pushed about by the capricious waves. Whereas, with her deep keel and rounded hull, the *Insoumise* had a smooth way through the sea, and the water embraced her form with a caressing, gliding motion.

For lunch I had prepared some beef with cabbage. Di and I did not touch it though it looked most appetising, because a long swell made us feel uneasy. Van went bravely below to have some grub, as he felt hungry . . . only to reappear on deck a few minutes later saying he knew what we felt like.

Those who were to be on night watch took an afternoon's rest. I remained on deck. The sky was choked with clouds like cotton-wool, and the westerly wind had set a dull sea moving. The *Insoumise* was to sail on one long tack until she picked up a sight of England. But I should be allowed nothing to do with working her across. For the first time on a sailing-ship, I was not doing my spell at the wheel. I was the cook. I could sleep the full night through.

The swell increased, the boat was lifted for a longer moment before plunging down a watery slope. Next morning Di stayed in bed, as she was not needed. I just managed to do my job, tying the tea-kettle to the iron rail running round the stove.

On deck the spectacle was grim. The same wind from the west reigned supreme; the same continuous, deep, deafening rush of air and water filled one's ears. A few tramps sailing up Channel were following their smoke, and sometimes seemed to pitch and trip over it. I relieved Guénnec at the wheel for a while. To starboard, the sea on our leeside was somewhat flattened and covered with scum. Our bow was kept so busy climbing up and down that we seemed hardly to move ahead. Breathing deeply, I felt grand, enjoying the life of the good boat with her tautened sheets. I longed to be working on deck, but I had to return to my pots and pans.

I gave 'them' pork and beans, while Van and I tried to munch sea-biscuits. With the boat heeling over, it was almost impossible to sit on the dining-room chairs, so 'they' brought their plates with them and ate on deck.

Land was sighted, a dark patch which proved to be the Owers, as the Admiral had foretold. We had not done much westing. It would be ages before we could reach Plymouth against such a head wind. The visibility diminished. From white, the canopy of clouds turned into an ugly blue-grey which looked ghastly over the green seas.

"It looks like a rice-soup coming fast," said Guénnec, looking to windward. Though the scene gave promise of a grand spectacle, I looked with envy towards the shelter of Spithead. Our boat was beginning to dance about.

As we were getting ready to tack and sail out to sea, Van and I jumped below: because of our list, we had left the lunch things on the lee settee. Now we turned the big table upside-down on the floor, and put the crockery between its legs. We were ready to wear ship as soon as the waves gave us a chance.

But we failed to get round, having forgotten to loosen the leeward guy of the mizzen boom. It was high time to take down our topsail, and in order to succeed, we all had to hang on to it and pull hard, except F. who was at the helm.

During the night, the 'dance' of our ship increased: some really bad weather was loose. We heard its dreadful wail passing over our well-screwed-down skylight.

On our third day out, at dawn, I woke up to hear a tremendous flapping on deck: it was like so many detonations. I forgot that I had felt sick in the stuffy cabin, and pushed by an anxious curiosity, climbed the steps with weak knees to find myself on deck in the heart of a wild, furious morning.

Silent and motionless, the Admiral stood at the helm, well wrapped in a dark coat, his eyes looking bluer than ever in the middle of a grey face. Forward, the jib was dragged alongside, through the waves. Full of water, it

acted as a drogue so that we hardly moved ahead. In every sea-way, like a hammer blow, the clew and the block of the jib halliards hit the hull. Mann and Guénnec had managed to slip a rope round the belly of the bulging canvas. As they slowly heaved in, trying to empty the sail, the rope snapped. I went to help, and by lashing the jib with successive loops from the bowsprit and using all our strength, we slowly succeeded in mastering the heavy canvas. After every lurch, the *Insoumise* had righted herself, lifting most of the sail, which might have given way at any moment under the strain, out of the sea. I learnt that the jib's bolt rope had suddenly begun to 'go', and it had been impossible to lower the sail properly. As soon as we came aft, the Admiral ordered the mizzen down to balance the boat. F. and D. had appeared to lend a hand, but Van was nowhere to be seen. I had no fear, as both the ketch and her skipper were a picture of steadiness.

This orgy of the elements was a great treat. I could describe it so much better if I could throw salt spray at my reader, send a gale howling past his ears, or make the floor lively beneath him. However, I was done up and wanted nothing but my bunk. Gathering all my courage, I went to fetch some milk for myself and our kitten, which had been curled up behind my pillow all night. The Admiral had piled up all the loose furniture on the floor of the saloon. A last great effort was necessary to wedge a cushion under my mattress, which was as uncomfortable as a footpath inclined over a precipice. I lay down and didn't move for the next twenty-four hours. The bos'un would look after our men; anyhow they had bread and butter near at hand in the deckhouse.

In mid-Channel we went about, giving up hope of making headway in this roaring westerly weather. Di got up just once because she could not cope with the milk I had given her. What would happen if I could not get my sea-legs? Would they label me 'no good', and land me at Vigo or Lisbon? As long as I could lie down, I did not feel unhappy,

except for the fact that I was so weak. And it was the same with Diana: we were able to smile at each other.

During our fourth day out, wind and sea went down, and the Needles were sighted. The Admiral woke up from the deckhouse settee where he had been snoring open-mouthed. Tired of rolling and pitching, he decided to run for the Solent. The flag asking for a pilot was hoisted. By then—what a weird change!—the wind was so weak that the pilot boat had to tow us to lovely Yarmouth. Di and Van having been resuscitated, the chaos below was tidied up, and when the anchor was dropped, a huge lunch was ready.

At last each of us could joke about what had happened during our crossing. The kitten could enjoy a walk on deck, slowly treading the wood with soft pink pads which had never touched earth. And during the afternoon the *Insoumise* might have been the yacht of the Seven Sleepers; she was dead but for a snore or two.

From Yarmouth we wrote to Yves, asking him to join us at Plymouth, in case he was out of a job after leaving the *Volunteer* at Ostend.

Next day, to the accompaniment of the gramophone, we all worked liked slaves at scrubbing the cabins, and a mechanic put our Kelvin auxiliary in order. Not far from us, a fat Thames barge like the *Volunteer* rested on the water. And once more I knew that I loved my old barge in spite of all my grumblings.

The day we started for Plymouth the weather was perfect. Our four shackles of chain came aboard easily on the motor-winch. Life was so peaceful that we were all in bathing suits—even our two old friends—and we threw buckets of sea-water at each other.

Anvil Point was passed under power. Lyme Bay was crossed during the night. A cliff was sighted . . . some brown-sailed Brixham trawlers . . . Start Point . . . Skerries Bank . . . 'Les peuples heureux n'ont pas d'histoire!': and the same can be said about happy passages. Already, under the spell of Diana's sweetness, Van dreaded the idea of being

landed at Plymouth, so he offered to pay Yves' wages, and the suggestion was accepted by the ships' council. The two girls of the *Insoumise* would have their 'chevalier servant' during the coming weeks.

In Plymouth harbour we sailed right up the Cattewater to anchor not far from the Barbican, a quay from which sailed many a ship to change the history of the world. The whole place was most picturesque, with its varied craft and old, blackish houses squeezed together along the front. One decrepit looking hotel was still called the 'Mayflower'.

Two lovely yachts were moored near us, the schooner *Semiramis* and the yawl *Lady Beatrice*. While teaching Van how to scull over the stern of the dinghy, I admired their glossy white hulls, their sparkling brasswork. . . . But my eye was caught by the yellow fluttering of a quarantine-flag hoisted on a tiny dilapidated vessel anchored in the roadstead. What a contrast between these luxurious creations and that small barnacled hull, flying American colours. The little thing had no beauty in her, but romance oozed out of every battered plank: I felt sure she had just crossed the Atlantic.

Sam, the old boatman who brought us bread and milk, knew something about her. "There is only one man on her. He is old, and he is very lame. He built her himself."

We approached with reverence. She was the *Pilgrim* from Seattle, clinker built, with a V-shaped hull. The rusty shrouds hung loose; the topped bowsprit was a bare piece of wood; the paint was gone from the roof top. I had never seen anything like it. . . . Her two huge anchors were stowed up the hawse-holes as on a liner. Aft, a canoe stern ended what were probably good lines, but the high cabin roof hid and distorted them.

The owner greeted us from the cockpit. Pushed back, his cap showed a lined forehead; with his kind, wrinkled eyes, his short round nose and his moustache shading his large mouth, he reminded me of Gorki. He was a small man, this lone sea rover. Hopping about, he showed us how he worked

his ground tackle from the cockpit. He seemed to be in good health after his fifty-five days' spent at sea. He had come in one go from South Carolina, sighting only five vessels between Bermuda and the Channel. Hove-to for four days, he had lived through frightful gales off the Azores; but he had never missed a night's sleep; he had lived mainly on potatoes and ham, and had felt as happy as a lark all the time.

His first little boat had been lost on a coral reef in the West Indies. He had built the *Pilgrim* on exactly the same lines: those of a Norwegian pilot boat. With her thirty-eight feet between posts she was longer than Gerbault's *Firecrest*, but her tonnage was only eight tons, because her draught was not more than three feet, if I remember rightly.

He showed us his small auxiliary, red with rust. "No, I have never used it," he said, "but it is in perfect order . . . !" His low cabin looked more like a workshop than a place to sleep. There, besides tools and spare gear, he had amassed sponges, shells and queer plants smelling of iodine, loot from the sea which he sold to his many visitors. His name was Thomas Drake. And just as he pronounced the word, I was looking at Drake Island standing watch in the middle of the roadstead. . . . Yes, he was born an Englishman, in Kent; then he had gone 'over', working in mines and saw-mills until the call of the sea had made him build his first boat. To my question he answered: "Now? I am making for the Solent where I want to rub shoulders with the King's yacht. . . . They won't like it much . . . hm? Then I shall sail to Norway, where I want to see the Viking ship they have discovered. . . ."

Dear Captain Drake, so gay and so brave, which sea is he sailing now? And is the fierce drakker, the Viking's ship of war, slumbering in some cold museum? I wonder, as I write in the disheartening spring of the year 1940.

We had come to Plymouth in order to check our compass, a delicate and most important job before a long voyage, as

the slightest error at the start may send you miles out of your course. For this operation the *Insoumise* was taken round the breakwater, behind the fort, and fastened to buoy No. 2, the three bearings of which on Eddystone, Kitt Hill and Sheep's Tor, are exactly known. While she was swung on a sheet of cardboard, the differences of reading between our ship's compass and the correct bearings were marked. The Naval commander who worked them out for us, looked at me so fixedly that I ran below to see if I had a smut on my nose. . . . But at last he spoke:

"Have you ever sailed in the Mediterranean?"—"Yes!" —"Did you dine with Sir Roger Keyes at Argostoli, and weren't you *Bonita's* Number One?" I learnt that our Commander had been in H.M.S. *Queen Elizabeth* at the time of our arrival in the Ionic Islands; and I felt proud, in front of the Admiral, to flaunt the names of friends made in the Mediterranean squadron. One of them was Steve King-Hall, whose latest play had been produced on the deck of the Commander-in-Chief's battleship. We all went to have drinks at the Yacht Club, where the Admiral wanted to show me the model of the *America*, winner of the Cup in 1851. This lovely schooner had her masts raked aft, exactly like the most modern 'Marconi rig' of to-day.

We walked on the Hoe, a lovely wide esplanade; we danced at the 'Globe'; and I was taken to a music-hall, because I had never been to one . . . but really because the Admiral was fond of such entertainment. (He always wanted you to believe he had vulgar tastes.) The songs bored me, as I 'missed the point'; but I enjoyed watching the reactions of the audience, who exchanged jokes with the artistes on the stage.

Coming back, at the corner of two narrow streets, we met a small Salvation Army band playing bravely for the passers-by. And the Admiral told us the story of a lady newly converted to the good Army. She had been heard to say: "Chaps! I have found the Lord . . . I am so full of joy . . . I could knock hell out of this bloody drum . . . !"

All our activities seemed most objectionable to F. He wanted to grumble. And he upset Di and me by suggesting that he had not had a decent piece of meat since he had come on board.

Meanwhile we had good news from Yves. He was delighted to come, but he needed money for his wife as well as for his journey. He was told to join us at Falmouth, where we wanted to careen our ship.

In half a day we reached this most charming harbour, which I have found mentioned in every book dealing with sailing.

We passed near the five-masted barque *Kjöbenhavn*, Danish training ship of impressive size. She was peacefully riding at anchor. But right over her, and nearly ripped by her trucks, a long black-bellied cloud composed a mourning frame, of bad omen. Soon after, the poor ship was to become another mystery of the sea, reported missing, seen for the last time in the South Atlantic. I think she has never been heard of since. We sailed up river, and tied up alongside the quay at Flushing, a smiling, peaceful village of old, low houses made of grey stony slabs. Everywhere, the hills sent down their trees to bend over the water. Moored quite near us, we discovered with astonishment our Ostend neighbour, the *Lady Maud*. Her owner, Captain Dixon, was a man after my own heart. He had bought the perfect ship for two, of some thirty-three feet over all. She had once belonged to E. G. Martin. But her owner not only cruised; he also knew the joy of racing on his *Jasmine*, a Sunbeam-one-design-class.

I was invited for next day's regatta. We were nine at the start, most of us with one reef down. We played a cautious game with these winged-chargers riding on top of the wave-crests. I was hardly quick enough to look after the back-stays. . . . With all the boats running wildly for the first buoy, my heart beat fast as we gybed in masterly manner. We had hardly time to notice the old *Implacable*, built some two or three hundred years ago, and housing jolly sea scouts.

For the rest of the race *Jasmine* was close-hauled, fighting every inch of it with *Little Lady*. In spite of all our efforts we finished second, one length behind.

Back in the *Insoumise* I found Yves, my old shipmate, just arrived from France, helping to store sixty sacks of coal. As I had not had time to wash up after lunch before sailing away to the regatta, I had now to handle plates and pans covered with nice black coal dust . . . another of the many little unknown joys of yachting.

After supper, the two girls of the *Insoumise* decided they needed solid ground under their feet for a while. They walked through a quiet village street, taking in all the tiny details one notices ashore—noise of gravel under the shoe, movement of a curtain behind a window—which they would not have thought worth enjoying a few years ago. And there, on the back wall of a garden filled with the golden rays of the setting sun, they met three sages of the village: tiger cats with silky backs. With polite purrs they acknowledged the well-intended finger which scratched behind their ears; but they never moved. They were in a mood of devout silence. Their attitude seemed to say: "We know . . . this is a unique evening . . . we don't want to miss a moment of it!" The land breeze was playing with their whiskers when we took our leave.

The day before our departure, as I was looking pensively towards the famous *Cutty Sark*, one of the fastest clippers that has ever been, I suddenly found myself staring at a queer vision: *Atalante* sailing towards me! It was not a dream. . . . Then I saw she was not a yawl, but cutter-rigged, and on her buoy I read *Jolie Brise*. I was so pleased to see the sister-ship of our cruising boat, that I boarded her as soon as she was anchored. She belonged to Mr. Ferrier, who must have been a misogynist, as my approach made him disappear hastily below. But I simply had to look at her, as it was exciting to study another Le Havre pilot boat so like ours. She was much smarter, with more varnish and

brass than our craft; but I also heard that she had cost three times more, having an auxiliary and many sets of sails. We could never have given such a polish to *Atalante*, but she had just the same lovely, powerful lines.

On the eighth of July we filled our tanks with two and a half tons of fresh water, which sounded as if we were really going on a long voyage. And in the afternoon we slowly crept out of Falmouth. In the evening a north-westerly breeze overtook us, and the galley was quite jumpy while I was making the black coffee. During the night I felt rotten, and then was sick.

Next day, carving bacon and cooking eggs while being sick in the bucket at the foot of the stove, was rather disheartening! And when I tried to bring his breakfast to the Admiral, who was waiting for it in the deckhouse, a sudden lurch sent the eggs to the saloon floor: I had to screw up my will and begin again. . . .

I was told we were keeping up a marvellous average, but I was beyond appreciating the fact. I just wanted to stand up long enough to cook something and then go to bed. All the rest was of no interest to me. That morning Ushant was sighted through the fog. The same westerly breeze blew mightily all the time. I knew that under ordinary circumstances, could I have remained on deck, I would have found the weather simply glorious. . . . The following night we rounded the southern end of Belle-Ile Island and lay-to, waiting in sheltered waters for a pilot at dawn. There were a few tunnymen who had put into Le Palais, and they revived in me many dead hopes and sharp memories. I collected stories from the local seamen on shore about a certain *thonnier* which, once upon a time, sailed into harbour manned only by girls. They had arrived after a many years' cruise in Southern Seas . . . ! The imagination of people had been at work already.

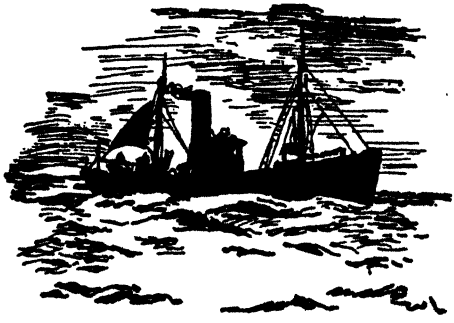
We all looked as if we needed a rest, except the fierce F. who spoke of pushing off at once. He was always opposed to delay, and as a result of his explosions, our washing used

frequently to become a mountain, as we never dared send it ashore to be laundered, thinking F. would make us leave next day. . . .

In the harbour of Le Palais, our sweet, meagre and funny little kitten Pouishnoff lost his life. Jumping after an insect near the port gangway, he fell into the sea . . . so our neighbour, the fishing-smack *Bienveillant* told us, when we came back from a swim on the nearest sandy beach. How we missed the boney little companion who had made us laugh so heartily. . . .

As soon as we thought that the gale had gone down, we pushed off, hoping to make Spain. But wind and swell were still a mighty nuisance. In the galley, trying to do my bit, I remember nearly suffocating with the heat of the coal stove. Then I discovered that by standing on the stove railing, my head reached the sky-light coaming and could be freshened by the breeze.

Then I nearly passed out. I remember the Admiral calling, 'No bloody good !', myself answering, 'I told you it would happen . . .', and then losing all further interest.



CHAPTER XXIV

Off St. Jean de Luz

I came back to life when the *Insoumise* rode at anchor, in St. Jean de Luz harbour, near the Spanish border; a long breakwater separated us from the Biscay, and we were still far from where the Maltese cook was going to take my place below, so that I could live on deck once more. I suspected F. of having made us call at St. Jean because there was a well-known golf course somewhere in the neighbourhood.

Still, Spain was in sight, and we might soon be under way again.

Somewhere to the North, along that shore called the Côte d'Argent, there was smart Biarritz, full of princes and millionaires. St. Jean de Luz was less showy. Families coming year after year from Paris or Madrid owned the villas scattered in the surrounding gardens.

From the yacht we could see every detail of our crescent-shaped bay. In the middle of the sandy beach stood the Casino with its long terraces, its gay parasols and its bathers scattered round the tents. Further on was the entrance to the tiny harbour where the fishermen tied their boats; there the old houses of Ciboure, with diagonal black beams across their walls, were pressed together along the quay. To the south, a headland, enclosed our small gulf; and the 'Réserve', a restaurant where people danced in the open every night, was hidden among the trees. The country beyond was green, and limited by La Rhune, a low blue hill which was an outpost of the Pyrenees.

The best swimmers of the place soon got into the habit of coming as far as the *Insoumise*, where they were well received. The Admiral was on deck all day enjoying the sunshine. His height, combined with his white hair and

his tanned skin, made him a conspicuous figure in St. Jean: he was soon as popular as his daughter. . . .

Every morning the jazz-band played at the Casino during cocktail time; and again at tea-time and after dinner. In the evening, from the far end of the bay, we heard the Spanish band of La Réserve. And our stay in St. Jean was literally steeped in music; most of the hours were lived against a background of rhythmical tango songs or Hawaiian lullabies; the beating cadence of the jazz was less upsetting to our work than these sentimental melodies.

Di and I went through the house-keeping quickly. Then we swam ashore through the green tepid water, and idled away an hour on the sand, chatting with friends and making plans for the day.

Often two or three cars, overfilled with gay, young people, would start for a picnic. Parties were also arranged at Sare, or Ascain, small villages where the Basque inns, enlivened by their bright checkered table-cloths, had a charm of their own. Or in a rush we drove to Bayonne, the quiet old town on the Adour river. There we drank what was said to be the best chocolate in France; it was thick, very dark and a bit bitter until you had stirred the sweetened whipped cream brought in a separate jug.

I liked to spend the afternoon at the *fronton* where the bounding Basques played their favourite game of *cistera.* What a thrilling spectacle it provided! The beauty of the clear *fronton*—commanding stone wall of noble proportions against which the men whirl the ball with all their might . . . the size of the court, which forces the players to run as fast as they can to catch a ball bouncing at the back . . . the fantastic *élan* these men can gather and impart to the ball as it darts out of the hollow straw bats strapped to their wrists . . . and the whole brilliant scene framed by old, dark trees. They played in two teams, serving against the wall marked with black lines, each man in turn throwing his whole body into a virile dance ruled by the exacting swing of the curved cistera. Chiquito da Cambo, though

stout and far from young, was cheered by the spectators when his most daring strokes succeeded in winning a decisive point.

Once we all went to San Sebastian, the nearest town on the Spanish coast. It was a Sunday and the whole town was walking towards the arena. We were going to be initiated into the excitement of a bull-fight by our old friend, Don Carlo della Rincorn. He knew a great deal about the subject, as he bred bulls in the south of Spain. I enjoyed the whole pageant except for the moment when the horses were led in to play their dreadful part. The Portugese Simao da Veiga was the star of the day; and though I knew nothing about the finesse of tauromachy, I could appreciate the beauty and the style of the man's movements.

In spite of the time we spent on land, we always did our work on board. Yves went ashore every morning to fetch the milk and fresh bread, and at nine o'clock the eggs and bacon would be on the breakfast table. We often got up at the last minute, having only slept four or five hours. Sometimes at dinner time we put all the dishes on the table in front of F. and D., and then rushed off to La Réserve, where we had been invited. The service on the *Insoumise*, I am bound to say, became every day less *soigné*, and F. even warned the Admiral that I was cleaning the bread plates on the seat of my dungarees. . . .

But Di and I did not want to be accused of shirking; we had decided to get through our work somehow before going ashore. Many a time did we join a party more than an hour late.

The Admiral told us—and I suppose he was right—that we were mad to accept invitations from everybody, 'because it was not done'. And one evening he kept the dinghy with him when he went ashore, so that we had to remain on board. We did not say much, but decided not to be caught again. Next day we landed, hiding shoes and evening dresses at the bottom of our baskets, which we left at

the Casino. That night, as soon as the Admiral had gone to sleep—as we could tell from his snores—we slid overboard and swam ashore. It was a blackish sort of night, and we progressed carefully through choppy waters towards the lighted Casino and its wailing saxophones, trying hard not to wet our hair! We appeared in public—in our smuggled dresses—when everybody had given us up, and our stratagem was a great success.

To return on board we had to follow the same procedure, stepping back into our damp bathing-dresses. . . . When at last we fell asleep in our bunks, we were rather pleased with ourselves. But next morning, things looked somewhat different: the Admiral had been ashore and had heard about our escapade. We had to listen to a serious talk. Di said: "If only you would sail out of this blinking bay, we wouldn't get bored and search for distractions ashore. . . ."

I was getting very tired of my cooking job. When I accepted it, we had spoken of reaching Gibraltar in a fortnight. But weeks had been added to weeks; and every day I had to stand beside the dreadfully hot galley stove. Every day I had patiently hoped to hear the words: "Ella, order the bread to be specially baked: we are sailing away in two days' time. Arrange with the Post Office to have our mail forwarded. . . ."

But nothing happened; and I could get no explanation about our plans. Probably the Admiral did not know himself what he wanted, or else he did not care whether he was here or there. I supposed that he was not keen to start on a long cruise with F. and D. But without their help he could not afford the good crew he needed to face an autumn gale at sea. He could only potter round and wait for more propitious circumstances. Van left us, and Yves too. Towards the month of October, most of the villas were empty and we had read all the books which were to be found on board. We had achieved the only aim we had been able to think of: our bodies were coloured a regular deep tan after many hours of careful exposure to the sun.

At last the Admiral decided to sail the yacht up the Adour River, where he could spend the winter well sheltered at Bayonne. The p.g.'s went home, and I must have looked morose at that time, because I remember Diana teasing me, and singing often a charming song with a Cockney accent:

"How now brown cow
Why do you look so sad . . . ?"

to which I used to answer by another of our favourite tunes:

"It's a feeling that may pass away
So they say . . . But not to-day!"

I was growing very fond of Diana, and I felt annoyed to think that she would spend the winter on board in a lonely way. I felt I had to leave soon, for I was nearly useless now that our p.g.'s and their golf clubs had left the boat. Though Di was completely self-sufficient mentally and enjoyed being alone, I hoped she would invite a friend from England to stay with her.

Once more, for the last time that year, we hoisted the *Insoumise's* loose-footed mainsail and her two headsails. At last we were leaving the lovely roadstead we knew too well . . but we were heading in the wrong direction.

Bayonne was not far. Sailing from St. Jean provided some exciting navigation, as we had to cross the bar at the entrance of the river. Though the sea was nearly flat, we met three fantastic rollers perpetually forming a liquid threshold between the fresh and the salt water. Up and down we climbed, thrown about in dangerous lurches which reminded me of a rushing scenic railway.

As we went up-river, the wide westerly horizon behind us became narrower, until the two banks blocked the view around us. We came to a standstill and dropped our anchor off a wonderful promenade. Very old trees growing in a quadruple row soared higher than our high topmast. And

in the distance the two slender steeples of the church kept watch over the town.

The sails were unbent.

A last *chocolat* was drunk in the small confiserie darkened by the low arcades of the old houses. The Admiral said:

"Maybe we shall meet on the snow once more. Anyhow come back here when you want to, and sail with us next spring."

I left for Geneva.

For two winters the *Insoumise* was laid up on the bright, peaceful Adour.

Sweet, strong-minded Diana married our friend José, a calm, small Spaniard who used to take us in his Bugatti through the country.

Six years were to go by before I saw my friends again. Just before leaving for China, I took charge of the *Windrush* for two months. She was a small, wet, fast sloop which had begun life as a racer designed by Herreshoff in the U.S.A. During a black night I managed to steer her inside Port-Soller on the north coast of Majorca. After having slept late, I woke up and inspected our green bay, which was completely shut away from the sea. On a neighbouring yacht I saw a familiar silhouette disappear down the companion.

I boarded her, thought I recognised a sea-chest used as a seat on deck, shouted a warning, and went below. In the galley I found the Admiral warming a feeding-bottle. . . . His baby son was toddling about, stark naked. . . . I remained speechless with astonishment. The infant was put in his cradle, a box filled with bran, which, I was told, was the most healthy couch for children not yet house-trained. This offspring, which looked like a prize-fighter *en miniature*, was called Mistral, whether in honour of the Provençal poet or of the lashing northerly squalls blowing in the Golfe du Lion, I do not know.

The *Insoumise* had been exchanged for the boat I was inspecting: a very handy Newfoundland schooner which a small crew could sail easily.

Presently the Admiral's wife came back, a young and cheerful person. With her was Diana, looking as charming as when I had last seen her. José, her husband, was carrying their son in his arms. We all bathed and swam around the yacht; even the soft-skinned babies were dipped into the sea from the lower platform of the ladder.

Everything seemed perfect. They were living in a kind of paradise, and obviously the Admiral was reconciled with José, to whose marriage with Diana he had been strongly opposed.

But soon I noticed that José looked tired and worried. He was a landowner, living and working all the year round on his estate. There was trouble brewing in Spain. Agitators were busy among the peasants. While he was away from his home, José knew that his farmers were getting unruly. He thought that with calm and diplomacy he would be able to re-establish his authority when he returned. I have already mentioned how much Diana suffered during the civil war which tore apart everything and everybody in Spain.

I know nothing more about these friends, who were my shipmates on the stout *Insoumise*, the ketch which had once been an Ostend pilot-boat.

In a novel you find yourself holding in one hand the complete stories of the people described in it. But life is different, it allows you only a glimpse here and there into your friends' lives. . . .

CHAPTER XXV

Filming Plans

For many years my life followed the same cadence: the sea in summer succeeded by Switzerland in winter. Though far apart, these two worlds taught me what my journeys in the East were later to emphasise: how superfluous is everything we imagine indispensable. In spite of poor shelter and poor food, I knew I felt happier than if I had been a millionaire. I breathed the keen air, where the dazzling sun pours a brightness many times more intense than that which falls on fields and towns . . . a brightness reflected by every crystal of the snow, by every sparkling edge of the sea. Skiing expeditions or sailing cruises roused in me some dormant faculty which made me more conscious of life's many aspects. I acquired what every child brought up in the country is born with: a link with the reality of our earth, and a deep love for simple people.

Both on the sea and in the mountains, you belong to a limitless world. Whether it is called a chart or a map, you choose on it a course from one region to another, sailing round headlands or climbing over passes, discovering slowly what lies beyond. Water and snow are both fluid elements; they are treacherous and they force you to be on the lookout. At sea you must beware of currents, of banks, of big waves ready to poop you . . . especially when you are 'taking it straight', running before the wind. Climbing on skis in the mountains, you have to tack towards a snowy summit, choosing the best board and remembering that at any moment the waves of an avalanche can drown you. . . . And gliding downhill, you feel the up-turned bows of your skis open the yielding whiteness of the snowfields in the

same way that the stem of a yacht divides the sea.

In either of these worlds you are lost if you do not have a compass when the fog blankets every bearing, while muffling all the sounds around you. Alpine squalls throw sprays of snow-flakes at you, which melt and drip down your sweating brow. . . . After many hours' search, you sight a hut at last. When you open your binding with a click in the lee-side of a wall, you feel the same joy as when your anchor-chain rattles down, in the corner of a longed-for harbour.

On the sea and on the snow, if you move with the help of a machine, you miss an intimate understanding of nature which is invaluable. While sailing or climbing, you learn unwritten laws which you must obey if you want to live. The observance of these laws helps you to win the friendship of mountain guides or enter the great community of sailors. I am filled with love for these people and their kin . . . a love which is continually surging in me, nearly drowning me, because I do not know what to do with it. If only I were able to praise their deeds, to sculpt or paint them. . . . Wrinkled seamen and tanned hill people have the same weather-beaten faces, lit up by clear eyes used to face dangers which do not forgive a mistake. Sometimes for many days these men live alone. They develop an innate dignity which contrasts strongly with the bearing of the townspeople . . . and they make you feel that man can be a wonderful creation.

I wanted others to open their eyes to what I had discovered and the film seemed to me the best way to capture the beauty which I had seen little by little in my two worlds. I discussed it with my friend the producer who had come with us on the *Atalante*. France was much behind Germany as far as *films documentaires* were concerned, but we thought we might interest the company which had helped us till now. I began writing a script, starring the snow and its dramatic life. It was simply marvellous—but I am not going to tell

you too much about it, because someone might pinch my ideas!

I wanted to show snow-flakes, born strong and vigorous, coming down out of a grey sky, when spells of warm weather belong to the past and snow is beginning its conquest of the mountain world. In every part of the hills, whether wild and rocky, or wooded and inhabited, my snow encounters many difficulties—frost, the blazing sun, the storm that hurls everything along the crests. The wind thrusts it on to a corniche; more snow is piled on top of it, crushing it mightily. At last the corniche breaks, starting the roaring avalanche. . . . The whirling masses settle down; and at last the snow lies quietly, enjoying unchallenged sovereignty and supreme beauty.

But later there are queer reactions in the top layer that covers the slope. Heat during the day-time produces thaw, and makes the surface heavy and wet. At night, frost or an unexpected fall of snow, is a sign that winter is struggling to maintain its powerful sway. Later, waves of warmth ooze out of the soil, and slowly the silky spear of a crocus forces its way upwards. One day the caress of the sun is so strong, and penetrates so deeply, that the snow-flakes surrender and melt away. In the form of clear drops of water they trickle down-hill from one blade of crushed grass to another. The snow is retreating on the whole front of the mountains, beaten by the victorious and life-creating sun. . . .

Thinking about motion pictures, I had another idea. In a flash I saw the wonderful film I could produce. During my sailing life, my eyes had been filled by the beauty of movement. I knew that only the film could capture the miraculous swaying motion of a boat through wind and water. I began to write the story of a yacht. The best of everything is necessary for her construction. It is hard to enumerate all that goes to the making of a big racing ship. If not from every continent, at least from every latitude, are the various materials summoned. My film would show the

felling and the seasoning of the old English oak used for the frames. For the planking and the deck, teak from Burma is carefully selected. Egyptian peasants pick the cotton that will be used to make the sails, those bright sails which are shadowed pink when they pass in front of the sun. Spanish mines produce the copper for the tacks which secure the planking of the hull. From the Mexican jungle comes the copal which shines on the varnished spars. The best steel goes into the clever twist of the stays, while a modern metal like the *acier Monel*, pale, mat and stainless, is used for turnbuckles and chain-plates. Mahogany, enamel paint, oakum, lead for the keel . . . everything that is used has its story to tell. . . .

Once acquainted with the origin of every material, one can follow its fate in the building of the yacht. Under the big shed, the carcass grows slowly, its open ribs becoming more numerous every day. The frames show their lovely bulging fulness, and slowly their harmonious curves create the sweep of the ship's hull. Later comes the daring deed of steeping the mast and staying it . . . a hollow mast of a hundred and fifty feet, whose disproportionate height is a constant challenge to reason. The only way of showing the tremendousness of such a height is to film the sails from the top of the mast. Seen from the upper cross-trees, the long deck elegantly shaped becomes a tiny platform; 'shots' would have to be taken not only when the yacht is motionless in harbour, but also at sea when she heels over and the mast hangs far out over the waves. . . .

So far our yacht, star of the film, is not yet born: we have only seen what goes into her making. But now she slides down from the stocks. She will soon live. She has become a unity. She is no longer an assemblage of a hundred dissimilar things. She will live because of the men who are at the same time her servants and her masters. They will have to trim and tune her, to understand and love her, before they can race her with tense will, and adorn her with the flag of victory.

Undoubtedly only the film can show the perfection that human skill has attained in creating a fore-and-after that can skim close to the wind doing her fourteen knots. The exact angle in degrees is not important: the fact in itself is marvellous enough. Everything is movement . . . play of shadows and light . . . effort on the taut sheets . . . quiver of life through the whole ship.

Words cannot be used simultaneously enough to create the impact of the bow-wave, its thick curve, its transparence full of sparkles, its continual scatter into white foam . . . the splashing noise it makes . . . while the glazed hull flashes coldly, down there where it slowly disappears into shapeless, green, submarine depths.

How well can the film catch the slight heave of a straining jib arched between shadow and sun, catching insubstantial gusts of wind while the lee shrouds become slack; the rhythmical movement of the men trimming the mainsheet flat while the blocks creak; the spray reduced to a golden powder glittering in the blue; the power, the might of a yacht driven full speed ahead in the middle of an uproar of falling waves, while the deck glides under water and the foamy sea laps at the skylight coamings. . . .

Yes, such a film would show beauty in action. It would be a poem of what man can achieve when he makes use of the elements in their own setting—and does not enslave them by machines. . . . Then I thought how strange it was that racing yachts, the sum of such perfect craftmanship, should be built to satisfy the whim of business-men who spend only two or three afternoons on board every year. What would happen in a few year's time when there were no more large fortunes to pay for such luxurious creations? Could not rich towns or counties become joint owners of yachts, so that all the skill attained would not be lost through lack of use? It was high time that such a film was made while the art of racing was still known. Perhaps I could interest Berlin or Moscow in my film, if London or Paris were afraid to invest money in its realisation?

CHAPTER XXVI

"Atalante" Sails for England

I was going to spend the summer in England. We had decided to sell *Atalante* and, as the art of cruising was much in favour in Great Britain, we hoped to obtain a better price for her in Southampton than in France. We were going to take her across with the help of two fishermen.

After our long separation, we found her sitting peacefully on the Brittany mud, with a gull perched on her mast's truck. But once on board, we saw that she had been stripped of all her brass: the cap on top of the rudder-head, the end of the tiller, the rods of the skylight, the screwed deck-plates, the metal sheets nailed on each step of the companion staircase, and below, the handles of the drawers.

We started our work of scraping, sweeping, varnishing and puttying. The dinghy was pushed into the water to soak.

At high-tide, Calloch, our old friend, appeared on the scene. His launch tore *Atalante* from the sticky, clayey mud and brought her along the quay. At low-tide we saw that the rudder had suffered during the boat's long retirement: it was warped. Its braces were unriveted, and when we were afloat once more, Le Gonidec tried to unship it. But he did not succeed, as it seemed impossible to lift the main-piece high enough. So a clever job was done by hammering two long bolts right through the whole rake.

Miette chose our two hands, Pierre and Maurice, who had never been on a yacht. They were charming, silent and tough. Maurice had a black moustache and Pierre a fair one which he liked to curl upwards. They both wore wooden clogs. Their sea-stained drab was so patched up

that it was impossible to say what had been its original colour. Maurice said he was a good cook and praised the fish-soup he could prepare. So we bought potatoes, carrots, onions and garlic to put in our one-pot meals. And we added two demi-johns of red wine to our shipment. We talked about smuggling something to England, to make the voyage pay for itself, and because "on board a 'yak' it is so much easier . . .", as Maurice said. We toyed with the idea for a while, but decided to remain honest. I cannot help thinking that our complete ignorance of such a specialised activity had much to do with our decision. Had we known about an easy deal, I am not so sure that our piratical instincts would not have got the better of us. . . .

Though we knew we would only be sailing for a few days, we were once more filled with the joys of fitting out. Miette bought charts and the *Instructions Nautiques* concerning the Channel. The navigation lights and the oil-lamps were filled with paraffin, the binnacle lamps with colza oil. Crusty breads were put in the cupboards; tallow spread on the red-veined pitch-pine mast so that the mainsail loops would glide easily; the scuppers were freed from hardened deposits; the shroud laniards rove tight through the dead-eyes; the bowsprit pushed out chock-a-block; the pump-strainer cleaned . . . and at last we were ready to be inspected by the harbour authorities.

One thing was missing, but we only learnt about it later, when Maurice explained how, at the last minute, he had pinched our fourth life-belt from *Eole* the tunnymen tied near us.

Before we could push off, we had to drink much more than was good for us in our old pub at the end of the land, according to the custom of the country. And once more Georges Terriou made us listen to shocking stories, "just to see if our town-life had not spoilt us, and if we were still worthy of being called sailors!"

In the afternoon of the tenth of May we were under way, beating against a feeble breeze. Hove-to for a while under the lee of Groix, we hoisted the dinghy on board. At sunset

a grandiose parade took place. Slow-moving, dark-green seas heaved their oily facets under a slate-blue sky, while on the horizon a dark red mass slowly entered the ocean. We spent the night becalmed off les Glénans, but with the dawn a north-west wind sprung up and we had our morning coffee off the stern-looking headland of Penmarch.

Then the wind kept on freshening and I had to avoid going below; the captain cooked our lunch of chops, lettuces and potatoes.

In the afternoon we tacked through the Raz de Sein with the help of the flood. It was a stunning experience. The boat, the wind, the sea, all behaved in a weird way, while we were deafened by the noise of the race. It felt as if we were not progressing at all as the tide was moving with us. But nevertheless we had the sea playing about on deck, gurgling in and out of the scuppers, while spurting water-volcanoes surrounded our hull.

We decided to sail around Ushant rather than tack all the way through the Chenal du Four.

Then we discovered that we had lost our fog-horn. It must have been left ashore with the *Livre des Feux* describing the lights of the English coast. Hard seas were hitting and shaking us most disagreeably. Sea-sickness loomed close; its well-known forerunner, abundant saliva, filled my mouth. Miette who had begun our cabbage soup, appeared on deck, feeling queer. Maurice was asked to go below and keep an eye on the pot. To our surprise we saw this hardy fisherman reappear quite soon: he could not stand it either. The menu was changed perforce and Miette made quickly an omelette for our crew: we ourselves did not eat.

The men did their best to console us.

"We are just like you," said Maurice. "When we first go to sea every season, we need four or five days to get our sea-legs again. Don't you worry. . . ."

We had heard this adage many times. But as we had never sailed for more than six days without touching land, we could not say if it really worked that way. We rather

felt that we were not meant to make the sea our career, though sea-sickness had never prevented us from taking charge of a watch.

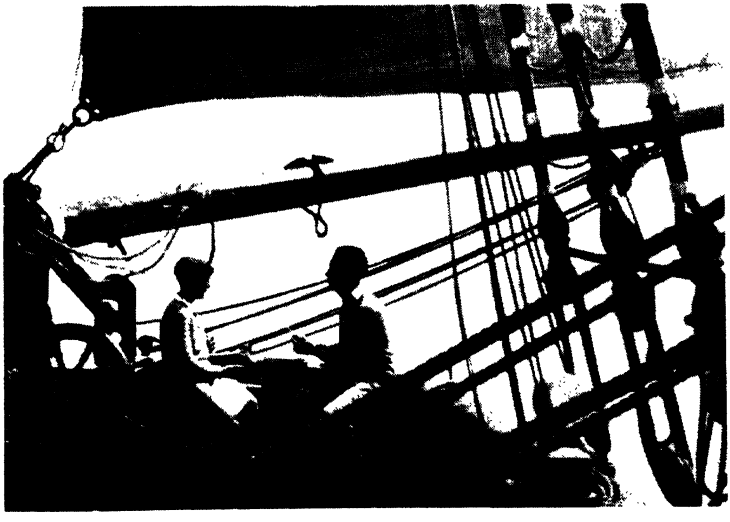
At that moment it was discovered down below that I had forgotten to secure the flare usually placed on top of the water-tank. It had fallen down during one of the violent shakings of the boat and the paraffin contained in the tin had leaked through the tight lid of the tank: the water tasted revolting.

Atalante went about and sailed for Douarnenez, well inland at the end of a large gulf. . . . It was a lovely calling-place, where colourful sardine-smacks, and bright tunnymen surrounded us, airing their blue sails and brown fishing nets. Our men went ashore to fetch some good water, and they brought back flat cakes made of black wheat, the daily food of the Bretons. Not far from us Maurice discovered his brother's tunny boat, and from him he bought a fog-horn. With delight we threw into the sea the emergency instrument which Maurice had cleverly shaped out of a broken bottle. He had been the only one of us who could sound it!

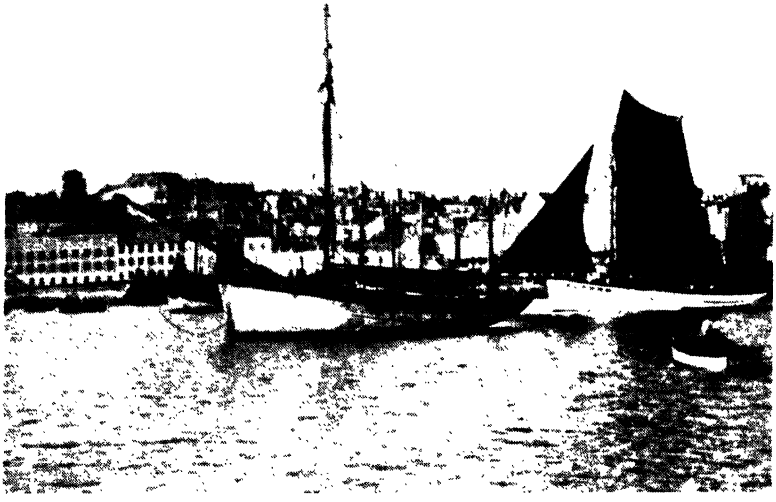
Next morning when we left, Douarnenez was beautiful. Houses nestling near each other, and hulls moored tightly together, were of the same bright white; while the red of the nets and the blue of the sky enhanced each other, reminding one of a railway poster on which things look a bit too good to be true. It was one of those perfect sailing days that make you forgive the sea for all the bad moments you have gone through. I loved our world of shiny wavelets and well-poised little clouds pushed by a caressing breeze. A haze filled the lower part of the pale sky curved towards the regular dark line of the sea-horizon. Accompanied by some fishing boats, we sailed across the bay to the Cap de la Chèvre and beyond it we crossed l'Iroise. There the breeze nearly died. The Pointe de St Mathieu, at the entrance of the Chenal du Four, could not be reached at the beginning of the flood, so we had to give up using that short cut; and once more we steered for Ushant.

THE TWO GIRLS OF TH
INSOUMISE

WITH TUNNY BOATS AT BELLE-ILE



DI AND VAN BUSY WITH FRENCH BEANS



BROWN SAILS AT DOUARNENEZ

ATALANTE REEFED DOWN

The 'white horses' we had been fighting against twenty-four hours ago had vanished from the sunny landscape. We were tacking towards the northern Atlantic, passing south of Molène, and avoiding the Fromveur Channel. At midnight, Ushant lighthouse disappeared below the horizon, but for a while the blackness of the night behind us was still swept by its rays.

With the return of daylight we hoisted topsail and mizen, which we had carefully taken down according to the old custom dear to sailors. We were close-hauled; the breeze was coming firmly from the north-east. We marked on the map every time we went about and read the number of miles our log would give; our dead-reckoning had to be accurate in case we were caught in fog.

We had plenty of leisure to prepare a good *soupe aux légumes*, and put it in the hay-box to look after itself. Pierre and Maurice were so agreeable to have on board that already it seemed as if we had been sailing together for weeks.

During our second night out of Douarnenez we picked up the Lizard for a while. The next afternoon saw us off Start Point, still tacking, and I began telling Miette about the last time I had navigated these waters when I had felt so weak on the *Insoumise*. So far the weather had been fine though much too cold. Then the north-eastern sky blackened threateningly, and we became worried. It looked as if something 'well peppered', as Maurice put it, was coming towards us. Quickly we took a double reef, and how right we were! We had to face a freezing squall bringing with it heavy hail which pelted the deck. . . . It created a savage sea which kept us dancing through the whole night. How comfortable it was to sleep in a cupboard bunk out of which it was impossible to fall . . . and to be away from the piercing cold holding sway abroad!

The morning was heralded by a blood-red sunrise. The sea lessened as we came nearer to the land. Where were we? It was for me to speak, as 'I had been there before'. An intriguing headland of red rocks was visible, and, in the east,

puzzling us, something which looked like an island. It proved to be Portland Bill—our navigation had been fairly accurate—and its race gave us two or three good shake-ups. They reminded us of the ones we had been through in the Raz de Sein.

We could not reach Southampton before night; and I was against tacking all the way up-river without seeing clearly what we were doing. I proposed anchoring in the sheltered Solent off Yarmouth, where I had been with the *Insoumise* and with the *Volunteer*. I felt thrilled to bring our boat into these waters so familiar to me. And for the first time, I thought it was I who knew more than Miette: but I was soon to be bitterly punished for my vanity.

It took us under five hours of glorious sailing to cover the forty-five miles between Portland and Yarmouth. We whizzed between the Needles and the Shingles, glanced at the lugubrious Fort Hurst to port, saw the pilot boats motionless in Totland Bay to starboard. Longing for a good rest, we anchored beyond Yarmouth pier as night fell.

Then I realised how powerful the north-westerly wind was, and I saw the ebb tearing around us. I could not have chosen a worse anchorage.

Our sails were hardly down, when we began drifting. One could feel and hear the anchor dragging on rocks. We hoisted the sails again and heaved in at the windlass; but the chain was chafing at our bobstay with all the might of the ebb pressing against it. We were getting near, much too near the Black Rock buoy, and we were powerless unless we could bring *Atalante's* head into the wind. Then only would the chain grow straight. Maurice worked fiercely; this tough seaman strained every muscle of his body so that tears gushed out of his eyes. Link by link the chain came in, and then got fouled on the windlass. We had to pull on it by hand. At the last moment we were safely off under staysail and spanker.

We crossed the Solent and dropped our hook seven fathoms under Hurst Fort where two barges had already 'put their

heads under their wings'. We relaxed. . . . I hated myself. For the first time I noticed that the muscles of my jaws were stiff and painful: for the last thirty hours, shivering with cold, I had forced my mouth shut to prevent my teeth from chattering.

At low tide next morning Miette decided not to sail: the sky was blackened by savage north-westerly squalls following each other. At mid-day we got under way. By the time we reached Calshot Spit, where our tacking work began, we had to take one reef in.

Further on amongst the ships at anchor, we saw the hammer and sickle flying at the poop of a three-masted training ship. Later we learnt that this Soviet craft had rammed a cargo boat in a fog; out of twenty-four men, only one had escaped by jumping at the Russian ship's bobstay. . . . We saw the mighty notch in her stem. While her captain was kept under arrest, the crew was known to be spending much money in town, carrying out propaganda for Stalin.

Soon we were in sight of the Royal Pier. I was tacking for the last time towards the Itchen. As we went about near the big buoy, we remained stuck in the mud! It was a silent, soft stranding, and not dangerous, as we knew that the flood was coming in. But nothing makes you feel more crippled and disabled than when your ship, listing heavily and with sails all spread, seems suddenly petrified.

With the help of the anchor streamed in the channel, we were soon afloat and sailing towards a safe mooring.

We had no English money. And as we had left Lorient six days ago, we wanted to buy fresh food. So before the shops closed, Miette was quickly rowed ashore by Maurice. She went to the Post Office, where nobody attended to her properly, perhaps judging her by her dirty, thick sailor's overalls. Poor clerks! their knowledge of yachting people probably did not go beyond the classical English types. They had the shock of their lives when Miette said: "Now, no nonsense. I don't need any lettering on my jersey. I am the skipper and owner of *Atalante*. . . ."

Meanwhile I was enjoying myself with the Customs officers. They kept on asking: "Where is your cargo?"—"But we are a yacht," I replied. "Can't you see our black-enamelled top-sides, our varnished skylight and our white companion-way?"

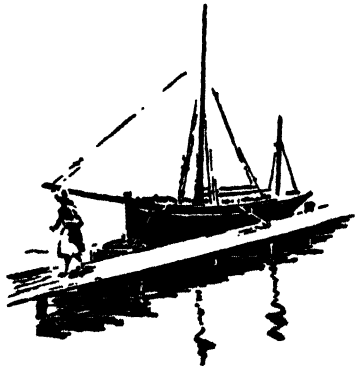
It was Pierre who upset them. They had never seen such a wild-looking yacht's hand. His face had disappeared under a beard six days old; his shapeless sea-stained cap was hiding eyes which twinkled with amusement; overpatched trousers and large clogs completed his piratical look.

When the authorities learned that our captain had already gone ashore, our situation was not improved. Maybe they imagined that our bag of smuggled cocaine was already landed? As soon as I saw our dinghy, I shouted: "Here comes the captain!"

In spite of their inborn phlegm, the officials were puzzled to see a girl being sculled by a second pirate. Miette could not show them any cargo, but she produced the parchment on which the Yacht Club de France certified that she had the right to fly her own colours and the club's burgee. At last all was well in the best of worlds.

Next day our men went back to France.

Helped by Halliday, the friend I had first met when the *Volunteer* arrived at Newhaven, we brought *Atalante* to be laid up in a shipyard on the Itchen.



CHAPTER XXVII

YACHTING

THERE, on the mud at low tide, I spent most of the summer.

I decided to live on board *Atalante* until I had got her into perfect order for her winter sleep. The main trouble was her leaking deck, which had to be re-caulked. As the shipyard's estimate seemed exorbitant, I made up my mind to do the work myself. At the same time I would be on the spot to receive prospective buyers of our boat. I also wanted to remain near Cowes, where I could meet the sailing big-wigs. My aim was to rouse their interest in my yachting film; and I had to obtain permission from one of them for my producer friend and his cameraman to work on board during the races.

My friend—I shall call him G.—was finishing a big drama in Brittany, and expected to be free when he got my telegram. He was bringing all the necessary equipment. We would live on board the *Volunteer*, which would serve as a tender. It looked as if the last chapter of my picture—describing the yacht in action—would be filmed in the best of circumstances.

If I was successful my next step would be to win over to my cause one of the companies which financed educational films. It seemed to me very desirable to show the inside story of a sailing-boat to all the children of Great Britain. A country which cared so much for the sea ought to possess such a film. I pointed out to the Directors, in my imaginary discussion with them, that it would also teach many facts about the colonies and what they produce.

As for the scenes showing the owner coming on board twice a year, they were perhaps not indispensable. . . !

Things went well. I met Colonel Duncan Neill, who was

running the *Shamrock V* for Sir Thomas Lipton. He agreed to let G. and myself work on board. I sent G. my telegram. For a long time no answer came. Then I learnt that G. had been marooned on a lighthouse by twelve days of bad weather, unable to answer me.

That is how I found myself without a cameraman, racing on the *Shamrock* at Torquay. It was an exhilarating experience; but on the whole, I prefer the feel of a smaller ship under my feet. The green '23 metres' was much too powerful a contrivance: it made you feel too small. There could be no impression of 'holding her', as twenty men were hardly sufficient to haul the mainsheet taut.

I remained squatting within two yards of Sycamore, the skipper; Sycamore, the man of Brightlingsea known to have nerves of iron, hero of countless races—including the biggest of them all, the America Cup . . . Stout and calm, I remember him working at the wheel, standing with difficulty on the inclined deck, clinging mightily to a spoke, his eyes riveted on his mate holding on to the weather-shrouds. Sycamore could not see his bow, and he was waiting for the signs which showed him how to steer. We had a thrilling experience when we were nearing a buoy, luffing our rival the *Astra*. It was one of those dramatic moments when inches matter. Every part of us was greatly strained. Then our stay was caught in the end of *Astra's* boom. . . ! It was terrifying. Not a word was spoken. The mast was bound to collapse as soon as the stay snapped. But nothing happened as the two boats were foaming along at the same speed. A clever stroke was given at the wheel, and mercifully, majestically, the two riggings parted from each other.

The tall sails, all leaning at the same angle and all white against a black horizon, chased each other over the green seas. I managed to take a few photographs, though it annoyed the skipper. He had warned me: "If you go overboard, we can't stop to pick you up. . . !"

More than ever I wanted that film of mine to be taken. . . . So far I had done all I could.

The *Volunteer* brought me back to Cowes. There for the first time I was going to be a spectator at the famous 'Week'! And with luck I might race once or twice, as the Colonel—according to his sayings—had friends in the Royal Yacht Squadron, the exclusive Club which had black-balled Sir Thomas Lipton. Miette would be on board with us, as I had been given permission to invite her; and Yvonne would come too, as she happened to be not far from us, staying with an aunt in Suffolk.

Frankly speaking we had little hope of being invited for a race. But our main joy was studying the many marvellous yachts around us. (We were less enthusiastic about the artificial expressions on the faces of the yacht-owners and their guests!) Such a luxurious display made our admirable Racing Week at the Creux de Genthod, on the Lake, look very small. The only thing we could not get used to, was the weather. It was so chilly that we hardly dared to swim. It was very different from the orgy of sun-bathing which we usually connected with our summer holidays.

After everything I had written to her, Miette enjoyed meeting the Colonel *en chair et en os*, and we both laughed at his eccentricities.

One day we decided to follow the races. As the wind was light and the tide set against us, Stone, the mechanic, went below to start the engine. He had no success. The Colonel —called Jack, Hippo, or Bulephant according to who was on board—went down to see what was wrong. We heard a few choking noises and then nothing.

After twenty minutes, tired of following the regatta through the binoculars, Miette and I went down below, too. . . . We found the Colonel snoring on the settee, still holding his cigar.

"Well," he said after we had roused him, "I might just as well go to sleep. That blasted boy has filled the tank with paraffin instead of petrol. . . . What can I do?"

I went back on deck in the hope of taking a sun-bath. I was beginning to doze when a swimmer attracted my

attention by shouting and waving at the barge. Then I recognised the sound: "Gobbo . . . o . . . o!" It was Puck, who had been games-mistress in the girl's school where I had taught. I jumped towards her and our embrace took place in the sea.

During the intervening years I had seen her once when she travelled through Geneva. She came to watch me captain my hockey team. And she still makes me laugh when she imitates me shouting across the field in the heat of the action: "En avant les arrières!"

Puck sailed with us next day. She tried to learn as much as possible about seamanship as she had decided to buy a tiny sailing-boat.

The Colonel was priceless, and true to the reputation I had given him. We could hear him bellowing at quiet, white-aproned Revell the steward: "What? I can't hear what you say. . . ." And in the same minute: "Don't shout at me like that, my man, I am not deaf!" From the noise one might have supposed that a catastrophe had overtaken us, but fortunately it was a small matter. "Well, Sir, I was only saying there ain't no piccalilli left. . . ."

Later on deck, Applebee, the hand, told him something about the topsail downhaul. To which the Colonel replied, trying to look furious: "Damme! What do you mean? Can't you speak proper English. . . . Do you mean that piece of rope over there?"

Puck had brought along her friend Sandy Rowe, from Sea View, a good sailor. As the Colonel had also invited two people we were rather numerous on board. It was difficult to decide on a course, as each of us had a different idea of how best to see the race while not getting in the way of the yachts. Sandy Rowe would have known exactly what to do, but as he was not asked he said nothing. His clear eyes noticed everything. Having taken a good look at our rudder, he finally thrust his knife into it; the wood was as soft as a baked potato. He declared: "It will fall to bits any minute!"

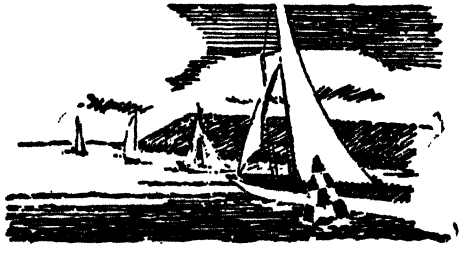
The Colonel's friend—elderly with a white moustache—was in his best Cowes yachting rig, with pin-striped white trousers and a proud yachting cap. The time came for him to leave us. Choppy seas were jumping at the bottom of the ladder, and stepping down, he failed to put his foot in the middle of the dinghy. Losing his balance, he fell backwards and sat in the sea, his knees and hands clinging over the gunwale, his two feet remaining inside the dinghy. Acting as a counter-balance, Applebee, the deck-hand, managed to pull the bulky body of our guest out of the water.

Meanwhile, screaming with excitement, the Colonel ran along the barge armed with a boat-hook. Bending over the sea at great risk, he succeeded in rescuing the smart cap of our visitor, which was bobbing past the hull. A minute later everything had been saved from the water, and our guest stood on deck in the middle of a large pool.

The Colonel offered to lend him a pair of dry trousers, to which proposal he replied:

"No, thanks, I am quite dry. . . . I hardly went in! . . ."

His answer made us roar with laughter, and I think that to this day he has not forgiven us. Of course, considering the diameter of the Colonel's waist, our guest was probably afraid of looking like a clown.



CHAPTER XXVIII

WOOLSTON

I WENT back to *Atalante* in the quiet shipyard up the Itchen, and spent there a lonely, queer, silent sojourn for a few weeks. On board, I cooked my own food, which became simpler every day. Only with reluctance did I start for Woolston, where the nearest shops were. It meant putting on shoes and a skirt, crossing the railway-line beyond the turnstile, and climbing the hill through waste-land to the top of the main street. Fruit was expensive; I could hardly understand what the shop people said to me, and I never knew what to buy except brown bread, butter and jam. I seldom went to Southampton, a town which to me looked like a village because of the low houses on each side of its long streets. I always came back hurriedly to my quiet boat: first by tramcar, then sprinting from the terminus of the line to catch the Itchen ferry before it left. As soon as I stepped on the other side of the river, I felt happy again.

There I entered a picturesque corner of the world. Within a yard of the water, a few very old houses, built of grey slabs, enclosed a part of the quay. There were usually two or three toothless seamen in blue jerseys, sitting on a stone bench. I always lingered a bit and asked them what the clouds had in store for us. Further on I passed a big pond where many old logs were floating, half-submerged: wood put to season before being used in the building of ships.

Back on board, bare-foot at last and in dungarees, I would resume work at 'my' seam where I had left it. I had needed a few days practice before I had been able to handle the caulking-iron properly. It is half-moon shaped, and I found the way to push it along with the fourth finger, while

hammering it in with the other hand. Working on that deck, the number of seams appeared to increase as I went on. Nearly every seam had to be handled six times. First the brittle, dried-up putty had to be pulled out with the withered old oakum. Secondly the bare wood of every narrow little trench, thoroughly swept, had to be fed with a thickish coat of paint. Then a loose wick, twisted out of an oakum's fair and sticky lock, had to be hammered in by the grooved half-moon of the iron. After another coat of paint, the putty had to be squeezed in by the pressure of the supple blade—the boat was too smart to have her seams filled with pitch or tar. Finally, two last coats of paint had to be applied to call it a job.

Bent on deck for many hours, I searched for the best position, kneeling or sitting on one heel. At last I found it: squatting on an upturned cooking-pot. But I could not avoid bending, a position which did not agree with my back; and in the evenings I was generally stiff.

From the top of my cooking-pot, I 'took in' my surroundings. There were all sorts of abandoned hulls near at hand. Some were inhabited by rheumatic keepers, who never seemed to do anything but throw a bucket of water on their decks at high tide. I remember the tub-like, grey, *Rigdin*, a kind of "three-master" with a bluff bow. Nearer to me *Hecate* had a long, old-fashioned clipper bow.

An elderly couple, the Bells, lived on a dismasted old cutter tied to the landing-stage parallel to mine. When the weather was sunny they spent their time sitting motionless in a queer deckhouse they had built themselves. They were dull and agreeable. He wore pince-nez; her hair was done in a bun. She kindly offered to buy the provisions I needed, and nothing could have pleased me more.

Beyond the Bells, I could see the tall masts of a four-masted schooner called the *Four Winds;* and more than once I spent the sunset hour on her high deck, looking at the landscape of sad houses in the west, when they were sprinkled with gold for a moment only. *Four Winds* belonged

to a fleet built in a hurry at Vancouver during the last war, to answer the increased need of shipping. She was for sale at a ridiculously low price.

Across the slipway, and tied to the stone wall, lived the *Freedom*, an original-looking motor-yacht which I observed carefully. Her owner, a tall fair man, was always at work, shipping or unshipping things, varnishing, ordering, explaining. . . . Once, when I had gone round to have a closer look, he came on deck and began talking. We did not stop for the next two hours. He showed me every detail of his expensive boat, which he had designed himself. I admired his space- and labour-saving devices, and learnt that his name was Pemberton-Billing and that he had been an M.P. I suppose he was too independent to remain long in any kind of organisation. And the name of his yacht *Freedom* was a programme. He had a fascinating personality. I believe that in spite of the 'public-school type' to which everyone is supposed to conform, it is in England that one probably finds the strongest personalities. But following the queer belief that it is bad style to differ from others, every kind of individuality is hidden.

Considering the moderate size of the *Freedom*, her interior accommodation was incredibly spacious. I had to admire the special bar, the special sink, as well as the special braces of the owner. His logical mind planned an improvement on everything that came his way. And before I could say that I understood nothing about engines, I was shown the whole bottom of the boat, filled with unspillable batteries of accumulators which made all his gadgets work.

At last I managed to take leave; I had by then an armful of books, among them Upton Sinclair's *Oil*, which was to make a lasting impression on me.

Behind the Bell's hull, I could see the white *Sunbeam*, with her slender topmasts and her three square-yards. She belonged to Sir Walter Runciman. Her captain and her mate one day walked along my landing-stage to look at the work I was doing. They admired *Atalante's* lines; and

soon the mate showed me his way of holding a caulking iron.

Then the captain invited me to have tea in his house. And there I spent a lovely afternoon, which Conrad could have described so well, as he knew how to evoke around a seaman the atmosphere of the far-away harbours he had once visited.

My host had been captain of the King's yacht. Before that he had sailed many seas on windjammers and had a unique collection of photos taken from aloft. Bill, the mate, was with us; he also had been through the training of a deep-water man, and I listened tensely to the recollections they exchanged. Meanwhile, the silent wife of the captain fed us with buns, scones, butter, jam, fruit-salad and cream. . . . What a feast! Later, in the garden, she picked presents for me: lettuces, onions and beetroot.

From then on, Bill often came to help me towards the end of the afternoon. I was looking forward to his smile; and it was cheerful to see the work speed up so unexpectedly. One day he brought me floor polish for my linoleum, and a better brush than the one I used to paint my deck; the old keeper of the *Rigdin* had just presented me with twenty pounds of light-brown oil-paint for which he had no use.

I was happy. Had I been born a manual worker in a village, life would have had no problem for me. Now every day brought its answer: the bit of work which had been done and which was useful. Our hands are meant to be used. . . .

I could have wished for nothing better than Bill's comradeship. He was gay and teasing; and just for fun we pretended that both our captains were slave-drivers under whom we had much to suffer. . . . Bill was small and dark; I liked the smile which lighted his blue eyes.

One Saturday afternoon just as I had worked well and was feeling that I deserved a reward, Bill invited me to a variety show in Southampton. I quickly heated two kettles

of water to give myself a special scrub. . . . Then we walked towards the ferry, looking forward to our evening. The theatre was mostly filled with men who had decided to 'call it an evening' and enjoy themselves. I wanted to laugh too, so I roared with everybody, though I never understood the jokes. Around us were many sailors; I felt one of them.

The other kind of distraction which seamen care for when they come ashore is to have a look at the country. Bill and I decided it was a sound idea, and we caught a Sunday steamer for Cowes. We had heard that the Isle of Wight was lovely, but we only knew it from the sea.

As soon as we had landed we walked away from the crowds, away from the town, along narrow lanes bordered by hedges. Our nostrils recognised smells one does not find on board. The dust, the roses, the horse droppings. A light rain came down, warm on our foreheads, making tattoo marks in the dust. The earth smelt strongly as the sun came out again.

We sat in the shade of a haystack. And for a while, we silently enjoyed being on the earth. We rediscovered visions we had known once upon a time.

"It's fine to see a cloud move behind a tree . . ." seemed the truest thing we could say.

Then Bill spoke. He could not live away from the sea. He had sailed for many months on the *Monkbairns*, the last of England's full-rigged ships. Slowly, he recalled his daily work as third mate, the jokes exchanged with his shipmates, the night-watches during which he felt anxious, and the feeling of utter loneliness one experiences during those long hours. . . .

What was to become of him? There were no longer windjammers to sail on. . . . He did not want to stick to yachting; he did not like it much because he was too independent. The obligation to be nice to the guests was a nuisance. So he was preparing for examinations in order to become a pilot; they were difficult and there was much competition. But what if he did not succeed? How worried his mother would be, somewhere in a Welsh village where

many of his brothers and sisters were living. When he had no more to say, he called me 'grand' because I had listened well. . . . It was the least I could do for him. He had made me think about my friends, and how many of them were at that moment struggling to get congenial work. . . . Where to fit in: it was always the same problem, and each of us has to find his own answer.

We walked back briskly, liking each other more since we knew more about each other's lives. Bill saw me smile, but I did not dare tell him why. I had just thought how marvellous and simple life would be, supposing we could fall in love with each other. . . . For me, it would mean living for ever by the sea, bringing up our children and waiting patiently for the intense happiness of Bill's return!

Events took place quite differently.

Within a few days *Sunbeam* smoothly glided downstream towards the sea. Her mud-berth was taken by *Elena*, one of the smartest things that ever floated, an American schooner which had just won the New York Santander race.

My job was finished and looked fairly all right. *Atalante* would remain dry during next winter in spite of the English weather. The tiller was lashed tightly amidships, so that it would not get bent again by the mud. The hatch covers were put on. She would look very tidy when buyers called on her.

A dinghy was waiting for me alongside. . . . I stepped in *avec armes et bagages*. And Applebee rowed me towards the *Volunteer*, anchored amidstream. On deck dear old Bulephant Jack was waving his bandana at me, uttering weird cries of welcome.

In the middle of September I received an S O S from Yvonne. As I said before, she had founded the 'Studio of Dramatic Art' in Geneva and had been running it with the great actress, Carmen d'Assilva. They wanted Paris to sanction their effort; and two of either plays were to be

produced at the Studio des Champs-Elysées. I had studied dramatic art amateurishly for years; and now they wanted me to act the Duchesse du Maine in Jean-Richard Bloch's *Dix Filles dans un Pré.*

So it was that I found myself on a Paris stage . . . a long way from a Welsh fishermen's village.

After three weeks of appearing in public I had to decide if I wanted to stick to the boards. My decision was made easy when I realised that I could not exchange the sun for foot-lights and nature's silence for the town hustle.

Sailing or farming seemed to be the only alternative ways of living which offered me what I liked. As sailing appeared to have lead me into a blind alley, was I going to take to farming? And join Bob on his silver-fox ranch?

No. I went to sea once more.

But first, there was the snow season during which I tried to quench my insatiable passion for ski-ing. In January and February I took part in a wintersport film, made in Mürren and on the Jungfrau Joch. It was called *Sportrivalen.* It cannot have been very good, as I remember Arnold Lunn —the uncrowned king of Mürren—hinting that I had better not wear my 'Kandahar' badge during the shots! (I was at that time one of the few foreign members of his exclusive racing club.)

PART IV

CHAPTER XXIX

The Last of "Atalante"

According to our information, the market for cruising yachts was weakening in England. So, with the coming of the good season, Miette decided that it would be cheaper and more handy to have *Atalante* on the north coast of France. Secretly we were pleased that she had not been sold, as once more we would be able to pace her deck and hoist her brown sails.

Of course it would be a small cruise and across known waters. We would miss all the excitement of the first part of an expedition, when one kneels over charts and gets drunk with the limitless possibilities open to one's desires. The second phase is the reality, with its train of worries, sea-sickness, intense pleasure, pains in the back, choked Primus stoves, lashing rains and proud moments at the tiller of a good ship when one feels guiltless and in harmony with God's wind.

A third stage comes afterwards: oblivion of the nasty moments . . . the saying to oneself: "I have done it with my own hands!" . . . and the certitude that it was right to break away from a softening life.

Miette's brother, the unruly Ben, and her cousin Zazigue, joined us at Woolston. Pale and lanky Zazigue astonished us by arriving with a young porter carrying his small suitcase! He has been teased about it ever since.

We introduced the two boys to our surroundings; to the *Freedom* and to the big *Four Winds* just bought by Pemberton-Billing (who claimed to have sailed her single-handed . . .)

to the stiff grey *Rigdin*, and at last to the jolly *Volunteer* who had come to see if we were all right.

Ben—famous among us for his remark 'I am a man, I must have meat . . .' developed a strong liking for the little peppered sausages one eats in England; and every morning he took the trouble of walking to Woolston to buy them.

We began by tidying things on deck, bending the sails and varnishing the spars . . . all the time keeping an eye on what was going on in the yard. There was much giggling at what took place on smart *Elena*, the American schooner I had found so beautiful a year ago. A small Swedish engineer was her keeper, and—yes, believe it or not—he put on gloves to do his painting!

Another day we saw the arrival of a small black schooner, the *Kinkajou*, which had come from New York in seventeen days. She looked the last word in efficiency. Money had been poured out on her, and she was fitted with expensive gadgets: next to her we looked most old-fashioned. Her crew was international, with two strapping Norwegians and one German chef nicknamed 'The Lille Wunder'; he wanted to clear his frigidaire of all the food he did not need; and we inherited pine-apples, cream, fish, over-ripe bananas and a plum-cake.

He was kind-hearted and quick-tempered, the Lille Wunder. He invited us all to lunch, seeing us working on the hard, splashing copper paint on our keel and sometimes on ourselves, dressed in sticky filthy overalls and muddy gum-boots . . . unable to climb down into our galley to cook something. But what with one thing and another—the Colonel calling on us at the last minute, and the turpentine having disappeared when we wanted to clean ourselves—we arrived on the *Kinkajou* one hour late. In a fit of temper the nervy chef had already thrown our four steaks overboard!

The same evening Miette and I dined on the *Volunteer*. As for the boys, pretending they had nothing to put on, they stayed on the *Atalante*. They were really on strike, furious that the two girls had made them miss their grand lunch;

they could not get used to our haphazard way of cooking. But, poor lads, I do not know what they did. . . . We learnt that they worked for two hours before they could sit down to some eggs and potatoes.

As we did all our dirty work ourselves, we thought we were losing much face with the yard's people. Then a Bentley car stopped on the quay near us, and out of it jumped Pelham Maitland, one of my ski-ing companions the winter before. We exchanged welcomes and shouts of surprise. He was preparing his *Freya* for the Channel race; and he was taking part in the Fastnet race as one of the crew of the *Grey Fox*. A few years later *Freya* was to start for a long cruise in the Pacific Ocean; but the day she left our yard, we saw her run aground before she reached the Woolston ferry. It was a consolation for us to see that such a shameful position could be endured also by first-class yachtsmen!

At last, on the second of August, we were ready to push off. As the tides up river were rather queer, we asked the captain of the *Margherita* for advice. "The simplest thing," he said, "is for me to come with you and sail you down the Itchen. I can be landed anywhere and come back by bus."

It sounded perfect. But to begin with, the captain put us aground, just off the docks. . . . And when, after much work with kedge anchor and lines, we were afloat and ready to land him, he had to 'take in' a good cargo of abuse from somebody with a cap on, because he had acted against the pilotage rules.

Feeling rather tired after this first outing, we anchored quite soon off Netley Hospital, so that the four of us could enjoy a full night's sleep.

Madly rushing along with tearing noises, seaplanes woke us up, and the roar they made still deafened us long after the machines themselves had become tiny specks far away.

As we passed the East Bramble buoy, we took in one reef; the sou'westerly breeze was freshening all the time. Then a heated argument took place. The boys, mistrusting our

experience and certain that they would be hungry at sea, declared that seven loaves were not enough to see us to Trouville. We gave in and decided to call at Ryde in order to increase our provisions.

In the lake-like surroundings of the Solent we had seen successively the *Berengaria*, the *Homeric* and the *Leviathan* move their mountain-like hulls within a stone's-throw of *Atalante* shivering in their lee. Soon after mid-day our hook went down off Ryde, within sight of two ships flying French colours: the destroyer *Léopard* and Virginie Hériot's *Ailée*. Happy times were those, when warships were used to escort yachts! The 'eight metres' which belonged to her, *Ailée IV*, passed us, racing for the Coupe de France.

In view of our coming night at sea, we played shut-eye in the afternoon. Miette, the first to wake up, decided to 'pull our legs' by saying that Virginie was alongside . . . But she was the one to have a surprise, when, peeping from our companion-way, she recognised *Ailée's* dinghy and owner being rowed towards us. We tumbled out of our bunks, rubbed our faces, combed our hair . . . and there was Virginie already coming down the steps. Still in his pyjamas, Ben was vexed at appearing untidy in front of a *jolie femme*. I still visualise her, clearly outlined against the dark panelling of our cabin, a white and navy-blue turban circling her tiny head. Rimelled eyelashes framed her immense grey eyes of the same colour as her hair. Her mouth looked always as if she was repressing a painful secret. Her body was so small and slim that when there was a two-reef breeze, she could not hold the tiller of her racing yacht. But she was the woman who had given up everything in order to live all the year round on her schooner; and she liked to represent her country in Italy, in Spain and in Norway. In that last country where every second man is a sailor, she was very popular; they called her the *princesse franque*, or the Fairy of France. In her own country her influence had been as strong as Gerbault's in awakening a wide interest in sailing. I have linked Alain and Virginie in

one sentence; and maybe here I can answer a question which has been asked many times. Did Gerbault take to solitary sailing because of Madame Hériot? I do not believe it for a moment.

Virginie had called on *Atalante* with the skipper of her small racer and with Captain Rallier du Baty, who ran her big 250-ton schooner for her and saw that she was not preyed on by too many sharks. He was a grand seaman though he did not look it, with his round, pink face and his straw-boater. Ben was thrilled to be sitting next to the author of *Fifteen Thousand Miles in a Ketch*, a book relating Rallier's heroic cruise to the Kerguelen Islands in search of walrus oil.

It was a grand day in the life of Virginie, because at last she had won the Coupe de France, a competition for which she had had so many yachts built. She had coveted the cup for the last fifteen years. But she had just lost the Cumberland Cup to *Unity*, in a regatta which had also taken place at Ryde. She was off next day to Scandinavia.

Her greatest news was that Gerbault, completing his round-the-world cruise, had arrived at Cherbourg on the twenty-sixth of July. He was somewhere on the French coast, as he was to appear at an official reception given to him by the French Navy.

On the fourth of August when we woke up, the sou'westerly squall was hissing so ominously that we postponed our departure. The wireless message received by the French destroyer said that we were in the middle of the depression which the weather forecast had announced.

There was a lull in the afternoon. We heaved up, hoping to sight the continent before dark next day. To be on the safe side we decided to take in one reef while still under the lee of the Wight. The log was streamed off Bembridge.

The more southing we did, the more sea we met. And I knew that once again I would do without supper. Bravely, Miette went below to prepare an omelette that Ben had to

cook and Zazigue was the only one to eat. . . . But we were soon on the same level as far as our tummies were concerned, because Zazigue had to feed the fishes before long.

Mine was the first watch. Jerseys were produced as well as oilskins, because of the chill showers. Our navigation lights were trimmed and well nursed in the fo'c'sle. I went through the same old smelly procedure, handling the small funnel, opening the paraffin tin, filling the lamps . . . seeing that the wick would remain quite level . . . and that it would not smoke and blacken its convex glass.

Sitting at the helm, leaning against the tiller well secured by its yoke-line, one eye on the lubber's point, the other on the pallid seas, I begin a turn of work I love. I listen to the water, the wind and the rigging . . . while, through a slit in the sky, a star shines occasionally. I feel enchanted.

Armed with our bowsprit, we open our way through a wind which is compact and fluid at the same time. The hardened sails lean on a part of the flowing mass by which they are pushed. To be happy, the boat needs to be moving speedily, otherwise the waves shake her too much.

Though almost entranced, I am on the look-out. I know that from the bridge of a steamer, *Atalante* cannot easily be seen through the squally darkness. Sometimes I speak to myself aloud. Well? What is this? A tramp making straight for us. . . . Yes, I have seen his green and red lights for half a century at least! I don't call that an amusing joke! His masthead light is getting higher and brighter every second. . . . But he must have seen my starboard light? He is bound to swerve soon. . . . I am foolish to get so nervous. Yes . . . No . . . I can't wait any longer! In the lee of the bulwark I light the flare-up and I hold high its long tongues of flame. At once the three lights of the steamer alter the dreadful steadiness of their course. The red one vanishes, the green comes forward and I can imagine where the mast stands up. It is much too near us, and now *Atalante* is shaken up by the steamer's wash.

So much shaken up that the shackle fastened on our boom's

tripping-line gets loose and plunges into the sea with a 'floof'. . . . The breeze is petering out, the boom swings madly about, until Ben answers my call and seizes it. The wind comes back as soon as he takes his spell at the helm.

At five o'clock in the morning Miette identifies the Barfleur light. The clouds clear away. And when I come on deck at nine o'clock after a good sleep, the line made by the Cabourg cliff is visible. High water at Trouville is soon after ten-thirty a.m. Can we arrive there before the closing of the dock which takes place an hour later? So far we are pleased with our crossing, though our landfall has been a bit too westerly. If the red flag is hoisted on the mole of Trouville indicating that the gates are closed, we can make for Le Havre outer harbour.

Very slowly we approach the jetties I know so well. The 'open dock' signal is still up. We bob over three enormous rollers, marine threshold of the River Touques. By then, weak puffs of a capricious wind are dead aft: fighting the ebb, we hardly progress faster than a snail. From our deck we push the dinghy overboard: it clashes on the sea in a bright splash.

But, what does it mean? The gate of the dock is closed, though the flag has not been hoisted. . . . In a stentorian voice, Ben abuses the signal-man for having let us come so far. At low tide there will hardly be any water left in the middle of the river.

"Don't get excited," says the gate-keeper. "There will be six feet of water in front of the entrance, with a bottom of soft mud. Wait there for the afternoon flood."

We decide to stop. The nearer we come to our destination, the more mainsail comes down. The manœuvre is not difficult, but we forget a fact which nearly costs us our bowsprit. . . . Leaving the river-bed, finding ourselves suddenly out of the ebb's grip, we shoot forward with too much way on. And we meet the wall most powerfully. It is useless to swerve off as there is only enough water for us just at the *bassin's* entrance.

At low water we are completely on our beam ends, a most shameful position for a deep-keeled sailing-boat. It is decided that if I put *Atalante* aground once more, I shall have to buy her a pair of shores. . . .

Happily she rights herself properly. And by the end of the afternoon we enter the *bassin* and find ourselves blinking at the shiny enamels and superfluous brasswork of the millionaire's yachts. Many a fairy-tale is recalled by the names of our nearest neighbours, *Ariane*, *Narcisse*, *Crusader*, *Mélisande*, *Eileen*, *Vonna*, and *Petite Circé*.

CHAPTER XXX

Solitary Sailor

Trouville harbour-master told us that Alain Gerbault was at Le Havre. There, he was bound to be booked up by the big-wigs, we guessed. But we had to let him know something of what we thought of him. With our congratulations and thousand welcomes, we sent him our address on board *Atalante* in case he liked to answer. But nothing came. Did it mean that Alain was not going to call at Trouville?

Our two boys went away, leaving us to lay up. By this time Ben liked *Atalante* so much that he had decided to buy her.

One morning some friends from Houlgate came to see us. They brought an invitation to a big *lunch de gala* given in honour of Alain at the Deauville New Golf Hotel. (Deauville is the modern seaside resort built to the west of Trouville harbour.) We refused, partly because we had no smart clothes and partly because we were afraid of being unhappy in a crowd of so-called 'important people'. We learnt that Alain was due to sail into our harbour at high tide, so we hoped to see him quietly on board.

By the time our friends left us, people were already standing on the piers, and more spectators were pouring out of every street. Gerbault's popularity was simply tremendous. The papers were full of his doings, he was called a national hero; and he had been given the Legion of Honour on board a destroyer. Journalists took advantage of his deed to boost the bravery of Frenchmen; they told their readers that France was a great maritime nation and that to sail alone round the world displayed typically French qualities! But, such bravery can never be the prerogative of any nation. Men, whatever their nationality, find courage in themselves when they obey the urge to attempt deeds of daring.

The bright crowds in summer clothes were soon very

compact. Then we heard them cheering madly.

At first we only saw the rigging of the *Firecrest* coming towards the dock; the mainsail was up. We were in the front row as *Atalante* was moored next to the gate, and at last the proud cutter appeared, towed by a motor-boat. Then we saw Alain. Sitting on deck cross-legged like a tailor and holding the tiller, our friend looked thin and worn-out. We felt a tightness in our throats. . . . It seemed fantastic that he had been able to fight his way successfully through immense oceans, through gales and doldrums, through unchartered straits and unknown currents . . . .

He was dressed in spotless white. On deck nothing had changed. There were not more than six feet between our boats when he glided past us, motionless.

"Are you sleeping on board to-night?" "Yes," he answered. "But I'll see you at lunch. . . ."

His voice had not changed; as always it was somewhat fogged, with the 'd' and 't' pronounced very smoothly as in English. We jumped in the dinghy, crossed the dock, boarded the *Firecrest*, and screened by the mainsail, fell in each other's arms. Good God! how hollow his cheeks were! We spoke hurriedly as he was wanted at the town hall. We said:

"Come on board to-morrow morning. We'll give you breakfast as we did at Cannes in '23. We are not going to the Golf Hotel."

"Of course you are . . . I am ordering you. I've told the committee."

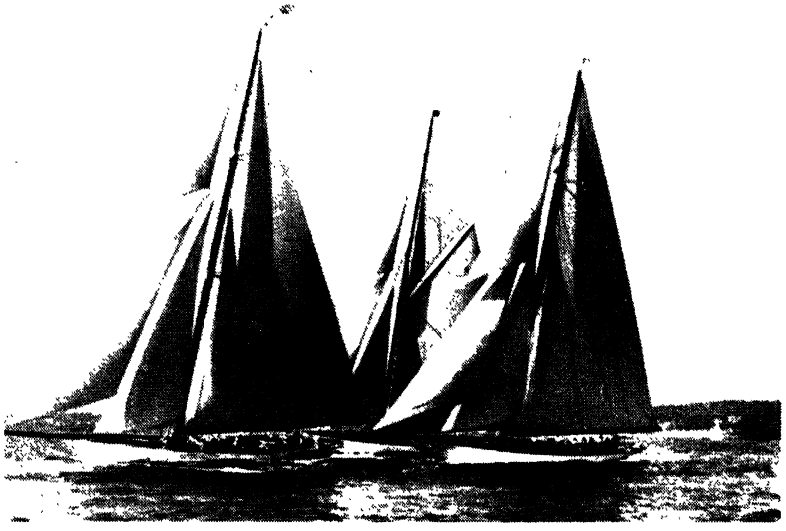
"But Alain, we have nothing to put on . . . and it is going to be dreadful . . . all the snobs who will be there don't care a hoot for you and your boat. You are just a good way of advertising the new golf. We don't belong there, and we would be lost, miles away from you. . . ."

"Shut up. . . . I have told them to place you on my right and my left. We shall be able to talk. As for clothes, come as you are. I shall keep these sandals (I haven't worn shoes for years), and look, this, I shall put on to-day . . ."

ALAIN, WITH HIS SEA ANCHOR, AND MYSELF

FIRECREST

UNDER SAIL



THREE BEAUTIFUL YACHTS

ALAIN GERBAULT

He showed us his A.B.'s outfit made of white linen, cut by Barclay and sewn by Mariolle the sail-maker! He was pleased with his original suit. Obviously all his years of wild living had not changed him. He was as fresh and childish as ever, ready to play with anything connected with the sea.

His friend Pierre came to fetch us. Three hundred people were coming to this lunch. And they were all standing in the hall of the luxurious hotel as we arrived . . . the smart ones, the rich, the blasé, the opportunist, the degenerate, the wordly. . . .

We entered, bare-legged, hatless, dressed in pleated skirts and white drill sailors' jumpers. And nobody knew who we were, a fact which piqued these people. Surrounded by official persons like the Mayor of the town, Alain arrived and winked at us. We moved towards our lunch. The hero of the day sat in the middle of a big horse-shoe table; opposite him were only three seats, for Miette, myself and a little man between us whose name sounded like 'Citrenne'. We showed our backs to the gathering.

With his long, narrow, wrinkled, tanned, hatchet-face, Alain was such a contrast to the smart lady who sat next to him that we had to repress a giggle. He had a duchess on his left and a countess on his right. A twinkle in his eye warned us that he was up to mischief.

He certainly misbehaved, but it was so amusing that we could not help following his lead. He began telling us how every part of the rigging and hull of the *Firecrest* had weathered the cruise. His two fair neighbours could not understand a word of this sailor's lingo. A few times they tried to ask a polite question wrapped in all the charm they possessed:

"What did you do during those many lonely nights?"

"I slept . . ." said Alain to the duchess. And then to us he followed up what he had been explaining. ". . . because the lacing of the trysail and the hounds of the stays had given way at the end of that ten days' gale. . . ."

After that he explained why he had adopted a Marconi

rig and why his sea-anchor had not been a success.

"Do you have enough fresh water for your baths during your long passages . . ." asked the countess.

"I never wash . . ." answered Alain suavely to the horrified lady. And then we heard details concerning his rolling reefing-gear. Suddenly his green eyes sparkled and he ended his sentence with the enigmatic words:

"Foolishly enough I had trussed the scupper of the spanker's jib. . . ."

We did not remain speechless with astonishment. Catching on to the game, Miette answered something to this effect:

"You ought to have toggled the mooring swivel of the larboard sprit. . . ."

We were enjoying ourselves like three mad youngsters.

After coffee had been served in the garden, we followed Alain into a queer big car waiting for us: an autochenille Citroën! We were driven over every mound of the golf-course. A specialist tried in vain to draw Alain's attention to the beauty of the 'greens', or to point out the qualities of the caterpillar which could negotiate anything. But though an engineer by profession, Gerbault was not interested by these explanations. He had turned his back to the land for ever, and belonged to the sea. Nothing else mattered. He went on explaining many things to us, about the trade-winds, and the best way to take a meridian altitude. Even when the caterpillar went down a big sand-dune by the side of the sea, he hardly looked at his surroundings.

As we crawled at last on to a tarmac road, the caterpillar shook us jerkily, and Miette thoughtlessly remarked: "Surely, we must have a puncture! . . ."

The little bespectacled man who had been my neighbour at lunch was driving us. Something he said about 'his cars' suddenly made Miette and me realise that he was Monsieur André Citroën himself! I was stunned . . . not because I was interested in the car-making business, but because Citroën was organising an expedition through Central Asia, and like a fool I had nearly missed a chance to speak

to him. . . . I felt powerfully drawn towards the people of the steppes. And since I had heard about this Croisière Citroën a few months before, I had dreamt of being signed-on as assistant camera-man. At once I turned all my attention to Citroën and found him fascinating! Of course, now that I saw him as one who might shape my destiny, I discovered that his eyes, though hidden by the *lorgnon*, were shining with intelligence. I told him about my open-air filming ability and that I was the person to make his film with the right understanding, because of my intuitive knowledge of primitive people. . . . But I learnt that women were not allowed in that expedition, which was to cost, all told, some eighteen million French francs.

At that moment, a daring impulse made me think: "If you want to go to Central Asia, why don't you go alone?"

The caterpillar was left at Gerbault's disposal for two days . . . a bright idea on the part of the Citroën advertising department, who must have taken it for granted that the solitary sailor, after four years spent at sea, would love to drive about. They could not dream that Alain would go straight back to Pierre's villa in order to show us his charts.

They were spread on the floor. And for hours, lying with our chins in our hands, we followed his finger across oceans. We learned the names of islands with more vowels than you can pronounce, we heard the surf breaking on the Paumotou atolls, we entered the pass of Papeete, we speeded along off Raiatea in an outrigger canoe, we saw proud Pora-Pora with its double-jagged peak, we admired the clever Maoris of Raratonga and the loined-clothed tattooed Fijians.

But the present Deauville was claiming us. Alain had to go that evening to the Restaurant des Ambassadeurs, where the Académie des Sciences was dining him. His friend Pierre, noticing that in our presence Alain behaved less like *un ours mal léché*, decided that we should accompany him.

We returned on board *Atalante* in order to change. And as arranged, we arrived at the Ambassadeurs at nine-thirty. As Alain was not there yet, we went to fetch him. We found

him on all fours, looking for his collar-stud. He had not worn a collar for years and Pierre was trembling lest Gerbault should go on strike. When he was ready at last, he looked at our practical travelling-evening-dresses and declared that we were not chic enough. Pierre's wife helped us to try on every one of her dresses until we found those which pleased our two men.

We arrived one hour late. The Duc de Grammont and Prince Murat were furiously pacing the hall: it was an awful moment. The dinner was for men only. So we sat at a table near by. Gerbault was soon assailed by celebrity-mongers seeking autographs; and with our mimicry, we certainly managed to make him laugh against his will.

But next day repaid us for all we had put up with. Porridge, toast, eggs and bacon—everything Gerbault liked—was laid out on *Atalante's* table, just as in our *Perlette* the day he left Cannes for New York. . . . While we ate, we spun sailor's yarns which sound their best when told in a small cabin.

At high-tide the *Firecrest* left for Le Havre. We were on board, hidden below so that the solitary navigator would remain true to his reputation. Once at sea, we enjoyed ourselves on deck. We tacked all day in the Baie du Havre just for the fun of it. The valiant *Firecrest* was a much battered ship, and her seams were all 'giving'. Alain had decided to put into a new boat all the money earned by his books. And she was going to be a little marvel. . . .

I was to see her being built in 1931 at Sartrouville. And I spent many hours on board before she started for the South Seas, where her owner has lived ever since. She was a double-ender, Marconi rigged, and of the same length as the *Firecrest*.

Alain took the midnight steamer for England where he was wanted by his publisher. *Atalante* was laid up. Miette went away. And the *Volunteer* came to fetch me at Trouville.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Navy Lends a Hand

The barge was getting more shaky every day. This time her propeller was out of order. We called at Le Havre and put her on the grid-iron. New bolts had to be fixed to the brackets maintaining the shaft at the right distance from the hull.

One afternoon while we were at Le Havre, I saw columns of smoke rising over a neighbouring dock. Something big was on fire. I ran along wharfs stretching over miles, and found the huge liner *Paris* having a bad time. Nobody knew what had happened. But someone spoke of a short-circuit. . . . Climbing to the top of a gigantic crane, I took a photograph of the scene. Smoke came out of the upper decks, screening off the big funnels. Maybe I could sell my pictures to the Parisian press and make much out of them if I reached the editors of the *Illustration* ahead of the agencies? I sprinted along the docks, along the Quai de l'Ile and towards a photo-shop. I still wore the sailing clothes I had worked in, and the seamen in front of their grey houses called me 'le petit Gerbault'. Those films missed the first train to Paris; and they came back later, having met with no success . . .

Alain back in Le Havre, came on our old barge a few times before we sailed for Ouistreham. We had peaceful discussions. For many years I had tried to make a living at sea. It did not seem to work and I knew I would have to do something along a new line. Though I belonged nowhere, I was not as detached from Europe as Alain. Since he had been back, he had felt unhappy, imprisoned. He belonged so much to the sea that what interested long-

wasn't so bad . . . it happened to every sailor now and then. He could hardly stand on his legs.

"Out you go, blast you! Revell, put his things in his bag and bring it to me. I am through with him."

The man had been paid the day before. I felt free to act. Jules, the other man, threw Dominique's bag on the quay. When the drunkard appeared on deck I pushed him gently towards the muddy steps. He kept on making excuses . . . how could he know . . . he was sure we wouldn't go under weigh, as Miss Ella was bound to wait for Monsieur Alain who was coming on Sunday. . . .'

At last the unwanted man was landed, our bow swung seawards, the stern line cast off, and we chugged along through the trawlers crowding the smelly harbour.

As we cleared the breakwater, rising to the long swell that sent doors banging down below, the Colonel appeared on deck in pyjamas, yawning. He knew nothing of what had taken place. His eyes were soon popping out of his head when Mr. Mate told him how she had chucked the disobedient Dominique ashore.

We decided to pick up a man in Dover. We kept the auxiliary working as there was no wind to speak of, and many pale, shiny patches on the surface of the heaving water . . . a bald sea. I was bored by our mechanical way of progressing. And once more the unceasing quivering created by the engine drove me half crazy; even on deck at the helm, I could hear below knives battering on plates on the luncheon table; I climbed on top of the aft skylight and searched the horizon for a darkening line. I could sight nothing. So I called three times for the wind, according to our old Mediterranean incantation: "Fraîche! . . . Fraîche! . . . Fraîche! . . ."

And, believe it or not, two hours later when I came back on deck after a nap, an east wind was ruling the waves. It meant beating to windward with the sails set, as the breeze and the sea were soon too strong to let us motor straight ahead under bare poles. For a few hours we went on

fairly well, except that the scurrying squalls forced us to steer with one third of the mainsail lifting. But with the turn of the tide we began stumbling wildly like a heavy cart crossing a succession of ditches. As we were staggering in the bottom of a water-trough, there was a deep 'plonk'. The leeboard, hit by a sea, had split in two as if it had been a mere match. One half of it wallowed dangerously in the sea, towed by its tackle.

The *Volunteer* gybed and we ran for Boulogne, our nearest shelter.

A white squall overtook us. While the Colonel steered, we brailed up the sails, Stone lending a hand, as there was only Jules and myself to do the work. Our square and flat bow created havoc in the sea, parting or crushing green waves, while we were encircled by eddies of foam. Later we unfurled the sails. There was much to do and I enjoyed feeling every movement or effort of mine necessary. Then we sighted the entrance to Boulogne harbour. We had to approach crab-wise, aiming to the windward of it, as every big roller sent us helplessly adrift.

Once between the jetties, we swung the davits and lowered the dinghy. The halliards were loosened, the headsails pulled down in a heap, and quickly, with all our might, we topped our long bowsprit so that we should have more room for our harbour manœuvres.

Luckily the *bassin a flot* was still open. It meant that Mr. Mate would have a quiet sleep with no need to look after the lines of our falling and rising hull. I took the helm, while the Colonel handled the engine clutch which had a predilection for slipping in and out of gear without warning. In spite of my efforts to remain simple, I could not help showing off a little: the Commander of a French submarine was studying the *Volunteer* through his field-glasses. Beyond, officers and men of H.M.S. *Selkirk* took notice of our movements. Our auxiliary reversed happily at the right moment, the fenders were overboard, and the barge was gently brought alongside. I could hear the onlookers saying: "Yes! Of course it's a girl!"

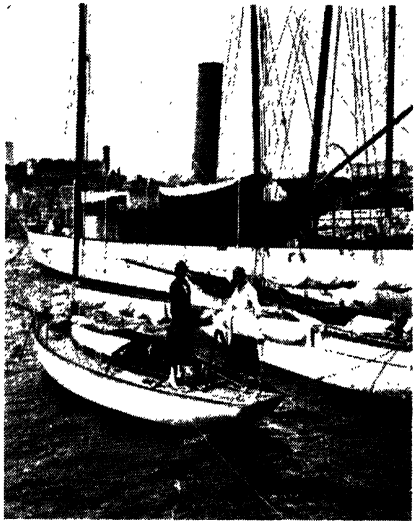
I decided to dive modestly below. The Colonel soon joined me and asked if I had seen the *Selkirk*, an old friend of his, met before at Calais. Her commander had been invited for dinner and had looked pleased to see our 'old tub' come into harbour. So that was that. . . . The interest shown by crew and officer had had little to do with my being at the helm.

Commander Healey was most charming, and for him the Colonel produced his best cigars and oldest brandy. Our owner enjoyed having a fresh listener to his jokes and a novice at handling the mustard pot bought at St. Valéry en Caux. (When one did not know the trick, pressing too hard against the bottom of the container sent the mustard darting out of the lid like a ribbon of dental paste!)

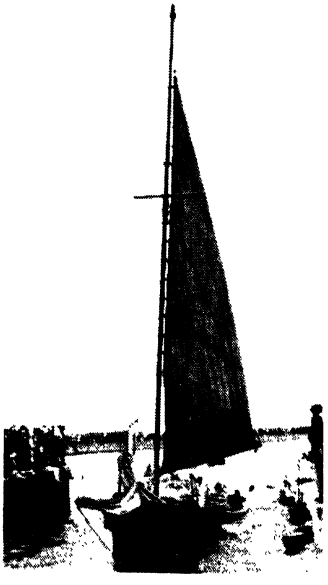
Next day we rocked with laughter when the Colonel gave us a demonstration of the great tunny-fishing sport. Jules and Stone sitting in the dinghy, supposed to be the red tunny, were told to row away from the barge. On deck and tightly laced in a girth supporting his fishing-rod, the Colonel measured his strength against the dinghy, to the transom of which the fishing-line was fastened. The rod was stretched near to the horizontal; the Colonel, bending backwards, controlled his rod masterfully while cautiously winding up his reel. The distance between the two did not vary much, though the Colonel gained half a yard every time the men lifted their dripping oars out of the water. Suddenly the rod righted itself, the Colonel fell backwards on to the cabin top. His reel had broken. . . . Our fishing expedition off Scarborough had to be postponed!

While our leeboard was being mended, Healey and I visited our neighbour the submarine, where a smart officer received us. There is no doubt that naval uniforms are most becoming and I was impressed by my two companions. I was attracted by them not only because of the magnetism which draws young people together, but because they represented what I was longing for. They had learnt something, they had a life's job, they were cogs which 'fitted in'.

PERLETTE
NEXT TO
FIRECREST



ON *PERLETTE*



FIRECREST ENTERING TROUVILLE

VOLUNTEER'S
AFTERDECK

APPLEBEE

I was getting tired of my vagabond's life, never knowing where the wind would push me next. . . . They, on the contrary, pretended they were like 'la chèvre de Monsieur Seguin' straining at the rope tied around their necks!

As soon as we were back on board the *Selkirk*, Commander Healey told me I could borrow as many of his men as I needed, until my crew could be re-organised in England. His sailors would like it, as yachting would be a kind of holiday for them; as long as I sent them back to Dover at the end of the week, everything was all right. The Colonel was delighted to hear of the offer. And so we sailed out of Boulogne with two A.B.'s of the Navy. . . . I have not seen that kind commander since, but I know that he gave up his sea-life to settle down in South Africa. I had a letter from him lately saying that he was reviewing books on the wireless, and that, dealing with mine, he had told his listeners about our Boulogne encounter.

The *Volunteer* made a perfect passage to Southampton, with a regular breeze on the quarter. We hardly had a sheet to trim until we passed the Nab tower; and our two sailors had little to do except stand at the helm and drink Revell's cocoa during the night watches. Sometimes sailing is no more than child's play. . . .

By then the Colonel was slightly ill. It was September and the barge was going to be laid up at Gosport. (She was to end her life there, dismantled and turned into a dump hulk. The Colonel partly exchanged her for a motor-yacht, which he soon sold to become the proud proprietor of the schooner *Oceana*.) I said good-bye to Revell, the silent steward, who was going back to his little grocer shop in London. Years later I saw him once more. He was on the doorstep of a small country house, by the side of a quiet Wiltshire lane. On a board fixed over the door I read: "Walter Revell, fully licensed to sell beer to be consumed off the premises." After sailing through many squalls he had found a peaceful haven . . . for the time being. . . .

With Stone in the dicky and the Colonel at the helm of

the old box-like Rolls, we motored to lovely Georgian Pythouse. For a few days I lived surrounded by the beauty of high rooms with many windows and huge fireplaces, of high lime-tree alleys and of broad, waving meadows sprinkled with dewdrops in the morning. It was but a short respite.

I was heading for surroundings different in the extreme. . . .

CHAPTER XXXII

What Next?

One thing was certain: I had to stop drifting aimlessly. To be practical was my aim as I had grown so tired of my happy-go-lucky ways.

Soon after I left the *Volunteer* I went to Berlin with only five pounds in my pocket. To make nature-films was still my ambition. And I was hoping to meet Dr. Fanck who was producing good 'mountain-pictures'. I spent nearly a year in the German capital, giving English lessons, acting a few times at the UFA in the English versions of the first European sound-films (with Marlene Dietrich working next door in *The Blue Angel* . . .) and writing small articles for Swiss newspapers. I led a miserable life in a town which to me seemed crowded with hawkers and beggars.

The main fact I had to bear with was that, as Miette had married, I could no longer hope to sail through life on her ship which I called our ship. I was tired of working on other people's yachts. And I had no money to become the owner of a cruising boat myself, especially since two banks had failed in Geneva, leaving my family in difficulty. At the same time my deepest roots had been severed since we had been obliged to give up our little old house by the lake-side, which was a paradise to me. There, with Miette as neighbour and many boats near at hand in the bay, I had spent summers filled with daring action, intense reading and relaxed sun-bathing.

Once I had broken away from my single-minded hope of making a life at sea, I discovered how strongly the world —Asia particularly—beckoned to me. There, unknown glaciers of the Kuen Lun glitter high up over the clouds . . .

the wide, slow-moving rivers of Siberia cut a clear way through the dense taïga . . . the moving sand dunes of the Takla Makane shiver in the glaring heat . . . Kirghiz horsemen trot with their provision of mare's milk swashing in the sheepskins attached to their saddles . . . chanting lamas, heads well shaven, swing their praying-wheels. . . . There the Mongol hunts with the help of his obedient eagle . . . the Tibetan shepherd blows on smoking cow-dung to make his tea boil . . . the turbanned Turkoman, crouching in front of his round felt tent, sorts his silky lambskins . . . the Afghan elder, resting under his mulberry tree, throws a pinch of powdered tobacco under his tongue. There the thick-eyebrowed Uzbeg merchants sit cross-legged on the platforms of the tea-houses in Samarkand. . . . The Ghilzaï nomads, camping on their barren uplands, bake their bread round a hot stone . . . the Kharot tribesmen disappear ninety feet underground to clean up the cool water-tunnel of the 'karez'. . . .

They all called. There were people and things waiting to be seen and understood . . . everywhere.

And perhaps somewhere men were working out a happier way of living than in our monstrous machine-ridden towns.

Russia was quite near. At that time the Soviets were great friends of Germany. In Berlin, better than anywhere else, one could get news from Moscow, see plays and films coming from the 'other side'. Was life perhaps different there, less over-burdened with nonsense and uncertainty? More helpful to the lonely?

As I had not been caught by the feverish 'struggle for life' which enslaves most men, I had had time to see how much our way of living is faked. The frames propped up to prevent the individual from stumbling were rotting: family, religion, society and state had been fatally shaken by the Great War. And I thought that I could swear allegiance to none of these dummies put up by men.

Most people who were young-minded between 1920 and

1930, wanted to know more about Russia where life was different and the past seemed to have been done away with. For answers to all the questions about which I was ignorant, I had relied on a few people who knew much and whose judgment was not influenced by interest. In 1925 some of my friends had already walked out of the Communist party. They could not go on giving lip-service to principles which were contradicted by deeds. Therefore I knew that the light in the East was fading. . . .

But why should I go by what other people said? As far as Russia was concerned I could easily go there and see for myself what sort of life prevailed and if man was carrying his head proudly on his shoulders. The fact that I was poor seemed to be rather an advantage when entering the land of the workers. I was through with our western countries, deprived of faith, and where nothing prevailed but a growing insecurity. I was deliberately blind to the charm of my surroundings. I was tired of stolid, heavy-thinking Switzerland, stiffening under the crust of old habits.

I was going to spend many months in the country of the Soviets, living with Russians all the time, climbing in the Caucasus during one summer; later to rove through 'red' Turkestan where collectivism was enforced upon primitive nomads; and all I was to see would be so thrilling that hardly would I notice the hardships endured.

I felt certain then that action and the outside world would bring me the help and the life I longed for. You can judge for yourself how ignorant I was and how much I still had to learn.

I left Berlin for Moscow in 1930, travelling third class, with a rucksack filled with porridge, and a little over one hundred dollars in my pocket—fifty of which had been given to me by the wife of Jack London.

I felt free . . . terribly free.

POSTSCRIPT

THIS last page has been written in 1940. The hour is grave. Externally and internally our world is crumbling. Now more than ever, we must search for real values and rock-bottom truth. Each of us, alone and silent, has to grope towards what is essential.

Each of us, by seeking far enough, ought to reach the same conclusion. Then, no more alone, we shall feel strong, and able to tackle a world-wide work.

To-day, in spite of the tragedy we live through, I feel less pessimistic than ten years ago, since I am less ignorant. I know I must turn away from the outside world which is not the ultimate reality, and listen to the strength which is hidden in me. I know that we have in us a spark of energy which cannot die. If we knew how to kindle it instead of unwillingly smashing it, we could create bonds linking all of us so strongly together that we could not hate or kill each other any more. . . . Our power would be limitless.

We are free to choose what we think is worth doing.

Quetta, July, 1940.

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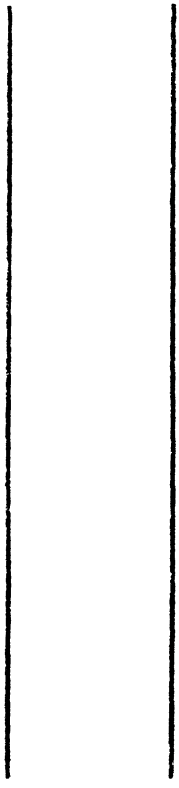
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